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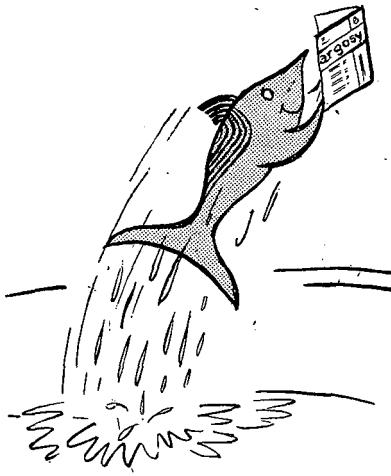

Log Book

DID you know that the farther south you pick your rosehips, the less vitamins they contain? Rosehips in Manchester are nicely full of pep, those gathered in Glasgow are so packed that the vitamins come leaking out of that little tussock at the tip. But Devon rosehips are poor devitalised things, and, of course, Italian ones are no good at all, except as a table decoration. So in future when buying Vit. C in rosehip-syrup form, remember to ask the chemist if it was made above Lat. 53 N.

This information came to us in a little book called *Diagnosis*, which arrived free through the mail. Do you suffer from mysterious pains in your wrists? Aha! The contributors to *Diagnosis* can tell you why. You've been drinking water out of the tap! You won't catch us doing that again, imbibing all the poisons the authorities see fit to drop in the water supply; old Uncle Horatio has rigged up a rainwater catcher outside the Argosy windows, and we can take a reviving dipperful whenever we like, only pausing to strain out the smog sediment.

There's a lot of basic lore in *Diagnosis*. Seaweed, for instance. Do you have a craving for sweets? If so, your body is instinctively demanding the minerals which, in primitive times, were concealed by the sweet taste of fruit. Of course you won't actually get them in a Chocka Block, but your poor misguided metabolism doesn't know that. What you need is a nice basin of dillisk or Irish moss. (We have tried the latter, it has a perfectly vile taste, like weak cabbage water, but no matter; you'll learn to like it soon enough. You had better. For, if you think about it, all the goodness is being steadily drained by rivers down off the land and into the sea. In a few thousand years, if we don't do

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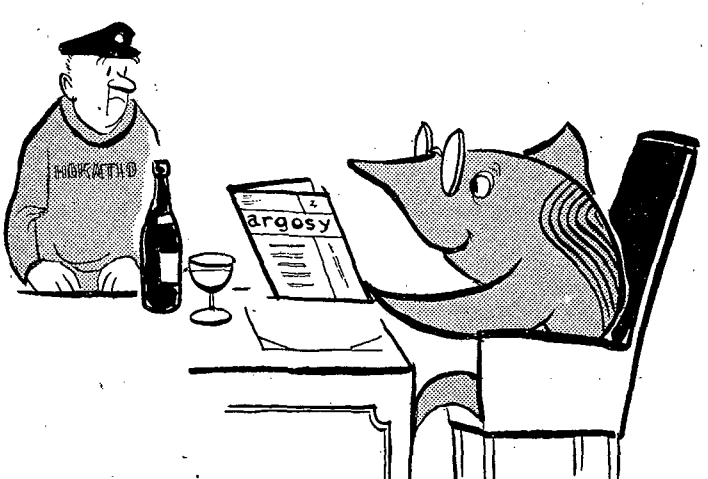
something about it now, dolphins will have taken over from the human race, and good luck to them. Dolphins or odontoceti are so good-natured—according to Pliny they have a deep affection for mankind—that we feel sure the world will be a more civilised place when they are in charge.)

Do you suffer from burning feet, trouble in walking, difficulty in swallowing, or poor vision? This may be because you habitually leave your milk standing in the porch. Riboflavin in the milk is destroyed by sunshine; if you aren't there to take it in before dusk, at least ask the milkman to pour the milk into a beer-bottle. In Scandinavia milk is already delivered in dark glass bottles; the sagacious Norsemen haven't got this southern obsession with whiteness and brightness.

More information: William Wordsworth walked 180,000 miles in the course of his life. If you suffer from gout, hardening of the arteries, low spirits or a high pulse, if you want to live to a ripe old age, get out and walk. (You might just as well anyhow, until they make all the streets one-way.) You may yet find yourself composing *Tintern Abbey* as you stride along, say, Oxford Street.

And watch the pages of Argosy next month: fortified by sunflower kernels, bone meal, rainwater, kelp, and Icelandic rose-hips, we and Horatio are preparing a never-before-so-good issue, with which will be delivered a pair of dark-brown glasses, free, to each reader of more than eighty years' standing . . .

JOHN SILVER



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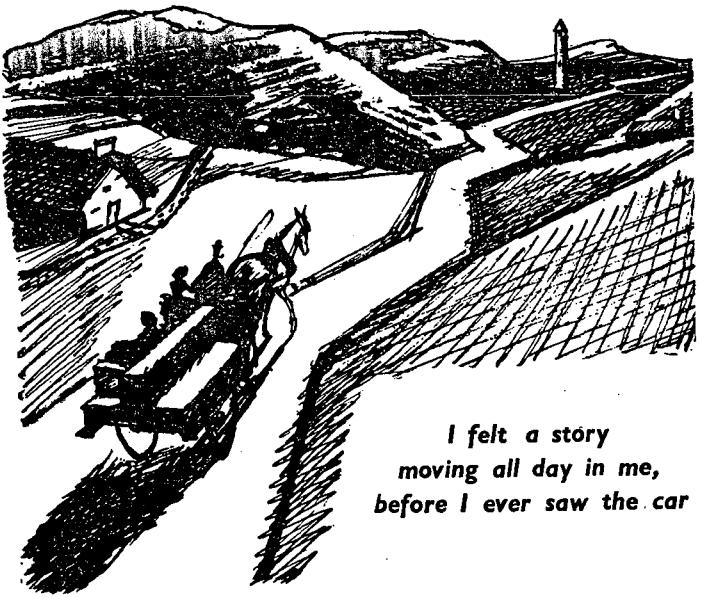

I felt a story moving all day in me, before I ever saw the car

THE mail had followed me from Paris to the village of Orion in the Swiss Alps. I sat on the porch of the small pension and listened to the music of cowbells and the melody of the river in the valley below. The sunlight breathed in summer gold on the green slopes.

I opened a letter with an American stamp and a postmark in New England. It was from Professor Collinbranz, a friendly letter to say he had taken a break from Princeton, and that my son Michael was staying with him at his house in the country. Collinbranz had chosen Michael to be a special assistant in his famous summer school. It was a great honour for a student in physics to work with a Nobel prize man, and he wrote about Michael as warmly as if he had been his own son. The postscript made me smile.

There is a river flowing down here below the garden, and Michael says it has a sound like an old Irish song.

It made me smile because Michael had spent only a few years of early childhood in his native land, and I wondered how he could remember any Irish river or any Irish song.

I listened to the river that sang down by Orion and I felt it

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THE JAUNTING CAR

By VIVIAN CONNELL

had a sound of memory. But I knew that all rivers have a sound that brings the past into the mind. Then I noticed the letter-head name of the house in New England, Owenbuee! Owenbuee! I came from a village in Ireland called Owenbuee that lay on the bank of the river that was also called Owenbuee. How on earth could a house in New England come to be called Owenbuee? And now the postscript that had made me smile became a mystery that was like the chill of a distant air in the sunlight of Orion.

I tried to recall what I had read about Collinbranz when he had won the Nobel prize. I was fairly sure I had learnt he was a Swiss who had come from the Polytechnic in Zurich to Harvard, and later had become an American citizen. I had never met him, but I had seen a picture of him and all I could remember was that he had a faraway look on his face. I could not remember the face, only the feeling that he was looking away into a memory. But there was no link that would explain how his house in America had the name of the village where I was born.

I tried to put it out of my mind, but it haunted me all morning, and in the afternoon I walked up by the Orion River through the Alpine valley, and it seemed to have the same sound as the Owenbuee when I walked by it as a boy at home in Ireland. I climbed to get away from the sound of the river, and walked the fields in the smell of Alpine flowers. But all I could think of was Collinbranz and the name of his house and what was the story behind it all.

I came down the flank of the valley on a path that led past a chalet where one could get tea or a mineral drink. It was a typical chalet of dark wood with flowers in the windows, and a

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small green lawn with tables. There was nobody there except a woman reading a book on the porch. I walked by, casting only a glance at the chalet, and then in the yard I saw something which, for one instant, made me think I was imagining things in the Alpine air. An Irish jaunting car!

I walked by the chalet with breathless steps and gazed at the car. There it stood, the shafts on a trestle, waiting for a horse. Here it was, high in the Swiss Alps, where there was no road, only a green cart track up the valley. The seats, slung at each side, hung waiting for passengers. It was all bleached and faded, but the wheels were sound, ready to roll. I lifted the shafts a little from the trestle, and the old car creaked. Gosh, it was alive! I nearly jumped off the ground when I heard the voice of the springs.

And then I knew. It had a story. I put down the shafts gently and I came round the chalet to the gate. I looked across at the old lady, lost in her book. Then, above her head, in fancy, painted lettering, I saw the name of the chalet:

OWENBUEE

I walked across the lawn, and the old lady peered at me through her spectacles. I spoke in French. "Madame, may I please ask your name?"

She took off her spectacles and looked at me with clear blue eyes, as young as those of a girl. There was a very faint smile on her face, and I knew she had guessed I did not come as a customer to the tea garden. Suddenly I heard myself answering my own question.

"I know," I said, "it is Collinbranz."

"Yes, that is my name."

I pulled the letter from my pocket and spoke again, "I got this letter today from a house in New England. The name of the house is Owenbuee, the same as this chalet. Would that letter be from your son, madame?"

"Yes." She put away her spectacles. "Come and sit down. I'll give you some tea." She studied me. "You look Irish. Perhaps it is your voice."

"Yes, I am Irish. I know an Irish jaunting car, though I cannot guess how it got here, in the Alps of Valais."

She called, and a young country girl came out and she ordered tea and then she searched me with those blue eyes. "Ah, so you have guessed there is a story behind that old jaunting car?"

"Yes." I paused. "But the strange thing is that I felt a story moving all day in me, before I ever saw the car or read the name on this house. I've been haunted by the sound of the river Owenbuee at home in Ireland, as if I were trying to remember

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something . . . I am an author, and I guess an author has a sixth sense about things."

Now the blue eyes sought into me like cold beams of light. "You have a sixth sense anyway. You see, my husband was Irish, and he had a sixth sense, or a compass in his soul, and it led him from a village in Ireland to Orion in Valais."

I knew I was near it now but one thing puzzled me. I said, "I don't understand one thing—how an Irishman can be called Collinbranz."

"That is a name from both our names. I was Branz, and when he became a Swiss citizen, we joined our names, because we were joined in all things. His name was Collin."

Suddenly I had it, and I leapt out of my chair, and almost shouted. "Cooney Collin! The man who drove away."

She smiled and signed to me to sit down and spoke in a quiet voice as if to calm me. "Yes, he was Cooney Collin. But you could not have known him. You are too young."

"No, but I remember the story, how Cooney Collin, the jarvey, drove his white horse and car out along the moonlight road one night and never came back again to Owenbuee. It haunted me, as a child—" Now I felt strange and suddenly I knew something I had never known. "You know, I think I followed him when I left Owenbuee. Along the very road he went away . . . Maybe I followed him, in my dream, on his way to Orion, in Valais—"

"Have some tea," she said, "and I shall tell you all the story, because you come from where he came, and also because you will understand." Suddenly she looked at me. "But why does my son write to you?"

"Because my son Michael is working with him, on the summer course. In fact, Michael is staying with him now. It is all very strange, but things like this always happen to me, so I don't feel them strange any more."

Once again those blue eyes looked into me as into a crystal.

"I can see that. Things come and find you. But when the great thing comes you must know what to do. I have tried to write down all the story of Cooney. When our son became famous, I felt it best the family story should be there if anybody wished later on to write his biography. I don't need to read it to you. I know it all by heart. But you know the place Cooney came from, and you must know the beginning of the story?"

I listened for a moment to the Orion River in the valley, and it brought me the sound of the Owenbuee, and then quite clearly I remembered the night I first heard the story of Cooney, the man who drove away. I told her slowly, as I remembered it. "I

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was coming back along the bank of the Owenbuee one moonlight night with Tim the Poacher.

We had been fishing trout with a silver rail that night. I must have been eight or nine years old. We took the lane to the village, and the moon shone on a small white cottage in a field. It was empty now, and the thatch was all blown and bleached in the wind and rain. I asked old Tim who had lived there, and he took out his clay pipe and sat on a stone and told me it was the house of Cooney Collin, who one night had driven away from Owenbuee and had never been heard of again.

"Cooney's father, Cooney the jarvey, had died when Cooney was eighteen years old, and then he was alone. He carried on his father's trade, and stood every day by the village forge, and was hired to drive people to weddings and funerals and cattle fairs. All day, waiting behind the white horse, he would read books about foreign lands. He had a dream in his face, old Tim the Poacher said, and he never seemed to be in Owenbuee at all. Sometimes he would look up from his book, and look out along the main road to Cork that led to the world, and he would say, 'One day I'll take that road.'

"One fine moonlight night he came back from a drive to a wedding, as if he were going home in the usual way. But he took the high road to Cork, and was never seen again in Owenbuee, nor ever sent word home. And that is all I know, and yet the story always haunted me, of the young man who drove away long before I was born. But what had happened to him after he left Owenbuee that night, or how he got to Orion, all that you must tell me, please."

She looked at me for a long time, the mountain blue very far away in her eyes, and then she told me the story, and it had become so much a part of her that I could almost see her driving up the Cork road with Cooney on that night long ago.

"Cooney," she spoke slowly, "always knew that he would go away from Owenbuee. He did not know why. He only knew he had to go. On that day he was at a wedding at a farmhouse up on a wild mountain, and there was dancing and piping, and the sun was golden on the purple hills. Then suddenly, Cooney remembered that it was his birthday, that he was twenty-one years old, and that he was alone. Just alone. He said that, over the noise of the piping and the dancing, he heard that bare word *alone* like one stroke of a hammer on a tombstone. He could not remember the end of the wedding party, and could not remember driving down the mountain road to Owenbuee. All he knew was that he had to get on the high road and go to—"

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She paused, and I asked, " To some place in particular? "

" No. Not to a place. To a person. But he did not know who she was, nor where she would be."

" Go on, please."

" He drove into Cork, and found a livery stable, and fed his horse, and slept on the straw by the horse, and at dawn he set off on the road to Dublin. He had hardly any money, but along the road to Dublin, day by day, he would find a passenger who gave him a few shillings to ride some part of the way, and that paid for bread and milk for him, and hay and corn for old Paddy, the white horse.

" On the last night before Dublin, Cooney slept with old Paddy in the barn of a farmhouse, and early on a bright and sunny morning set out for the capital of Ireland. It was at nine o'clock that he drove into a small village south of Dublin and saw a lady and two children standing outside the railway station with a pile of suitcases. The lady looked lost and anxious, and Cooney pulled up and asked could he drive them anywhere.

" The lady said she had just missed the train to Dublin, where she had to catch the boat for England. There was no cab and no jarvey in the village, and the trains were few in those days, and the children wanted to ride on a jaunting car, and the lady, who had a sense of fate always in her, said they would ride with Cooney to Dublin. The children were afraid they would fall off the side of the car, like most people who get on a jaunting car for the first time, and Cooney drove from the passenger seat, with a child holding on to each arm.

" Soon they were all friends, and suddenly, as they came into Dublin, Cooney asked Lady Clankyle, for that was her name, where she was going on her journey. She said to Orion, and Cooney said, ' I'll drive you there.'

" She laughed so much that old Paddy stopped, and then Alastair, the little boy, clung to Cooney's arm, and cried out that he wanted to drive with Cooney all the way to Orion. Then Lady Clankyle looked at Cooney out of her grey eyes and asked him if he knew that Orion was over the sea, in Switzerland.

" All he said was, ' I am going to drive you there.'

" Cooney said the whole world seemed to stand still in that one long moment, and then she said, ' Very well. You will.'

" The children sang with Cooney, but Lady Clankyle was very quiet, and they drove to the Shelbourne Hotel and she took rooms for them because now she would have to sail next day, when she had got a passport for Cooney, and arranged for his horse and car to cross to Holyhead in the cattle boat and meet them on the other side of the Irish Sea."

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The old lady looked down the valley at Orion, as if she had just come back there from Ireland.

" Now, we knew Lady Clankyle here in Orion. She had met her husband, the Laird of Clankyle, climbing here, and they spent their honeymoon in Orion, and when he died she came back every year with her children. She was a painter, and went out painting all day long, while a girl looked after the children and taught them French. That year, Monsieur Perret, the owner of the Orion Hotel, had hired me to care for the children, as I was training to be a schoolteacher, and could also speak English. So we were all waiting for Lady Clankyle, when we got a telegram from Dublin that she would be several weeks late, but to hold her rooms, and pay me, and she would arrive. A week later Monsieur Perret got a letter, saying that she was driving all the way in an Irish jaunting car, and would want a room for Cooney, the jarvey. I had to look up the word in a dictionary to find out what she meant by a jarvey. And that was the first time I heard of Cooney.

" From time to time Lady Clankyle would send a postcard from some place in England, then from France, and all the month we waited for her to arrive we talked of nothing but the Irish jaunting car that would drive up at last to Orion. The last postcard came from Geneva, and for several nights I hardly slept, hearing the sound of a jogging horse, and all day I kept looking down the valley.

" That Sunday, after the postcard from Geneva, was the day of a saint, and there was a small fête in the village, and dancing and music on the place in front of the hotel. Some of the girls wore Valais costume and were pretty as dolls. The sun was going down behind the peaks, and I was looking past the dancers, when I saw the white horse coming up the valley road. I shall never forget the shock of seeing him, and when I tried to call Monsieur Perret, I had no voice, and could only point.

" Monsieur Perret came and stood by me as the jaunting car came up slowly. Then suddenly the fiddler saw the car, and the music stopped, and the dancing, and the whole valley stopped in absolute silence as the white horse came up and Cooney reined him on the edge of the crowd. High on the driving seat was Cooney, the last light of the sun on his face, on his fair hair, and he looked slowly round at all the people with a strange smile, and then he looked at me.

" He looked at me as if he knew me, and I have never before or since had such an exalted feeling as when I felt his eyes recognising me.

" We all stood there in silence, and suddenly Cooney flicked

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his whip on old Paddy's neck and said, ' Go on, Paddy, talk to them.'

" The white horse tossed his head and gave a whinny, and I can still hear the wild roar of laughter from all the village. Then some of the men shouted and gave a cheer; and suddenly everybody rushed, and lifted down Lady Clankyle and the children and carried the suitcases into the hotel. Monsieur Perret called me over and introduced me to Lady Clankyle, and then Cooney strolled up and looked again into my eyes with a look of wonder, as a boy looking at a saint in a chapel, and nodded his head in silence, and I knew what he was saying to me in his silence: *I found you—*

" All the people came round to shake hands and welcome Lady Clankyle back to Orion, but the children, Alastair and Sheila, took me down to watch Cooney unharness old Paddy. Cooney pulled handfuls of grass and wiped the leather stains from him, then watered him at the fountain and turned him into the hotel field, where he rolled and rolled to get the dust of the long road out of his skin, then settled down to graze like a horse that is home at last.

" Then began the wonderful days. Lady Clankyle would go out painting all the places where she had been on her honeymoon, with a look in her grey eyes that haunts me on this very evening. And the children came out with Cooney and me, riding the white horse in turn, and singing the Irish songs that Cooney had taught them on the long journey. Then we were cutting the hay in the high fields, and Cooney would go and take a scythe and work all day, and because he was a countryman, could do all the things on a farm, and he was very tall and strong and handsome, and the menfolk here admired him and said he was a true Valaisian.

" Cooney was very shy with me, and I was shy with him, for I was only nineteen years old. We would go walking in the evenings, but we never even did hold hands, because love was such a mystery in us, it was like a spirit in the air. Then one evening, as the light turned from gold to silver on the peaks, Lady Clankyle called me up on the porch of the hotel, took my hands, seated me close to her, and looked at me with all that haunted light in her grey eyes, and spoke in her soft Highland voice.

" ' You know why Cooney had to come to Orion? '

" ' Yes,' I said.

" ' Soon I shall be going away. But Cooney will stay. You know that? '

" ' Yes.'

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" ' Have you both talked about things, my dear? '

" ' No.'

" ' I could stay one more month, if you could be married in that time.'

" ' Married? ' I asked, and I felt my hands cold. ' But I am at training school, and I must be a teacher, and—'

" ' I know all that, my dear. I went to see your parents this afternoon. None of that makes any difference. You must go on working and get your diploma, and then teach here in the school, and Cooney work that little farm your parents are going to hand over to him. You will have the money—a hundred pounds—that I shall pay Cooney for bringing us here, and that is all you need to start life on, because you have love." Then she paused a long time. ' I'll never forget the moment Cooney said, " I'm going to drive you there," when I told him Orion was over the sea. I knew I had to bring him. I could not understand. Now I know. Just as I knew I had to come here to meet my husband. Now go and find Cooney and bring him to me.'

" I found Cooney, and then we talked with Lady Clankyle on the porch and arranged to go with my parents in the morning to see the maire of the commune and get all things in order for the marriage. Then Cooney and I went for a walk round the lake in the pine wood, and I felt all light, as if I walked on wings that had a cold dew on them, like the silver mist on the lake, and when at last Cooney kissed me, it was all cool like the mist. All I could feel, walking round the lake, was, This is not for us. It is our love. But it is not for us.

" I could not explain the feeling until, just one year later, when our son was born, here in this chalet. I saw him in the first light of the morning, and I knew then: This is why we met, this is why we loved, to have this child. Then I nearly died. It was a hard birth, and the doctor said I could not have another child. But I felt that I had all my children in the one son in my arms. We called him Matthew, after Matty the Rhymer, some old country poet in Owenbuee who had taught Cooney to read poems, and books about foreign lands, so that he would know he had to go from Owenbuee to come to Orion.

" I taught in the school here, and Cooney worked the farm. In the summer we would make a little money giving rides on old Paddy to children visiting Orion, and we saved all our money, so that Matty would have a fine schooling for we always knew he would become a great man. When he was seven, he showed his genius for figures, and then we sent him down to school in Rion, because Monsieur Gallon and I did not know enough to teach him at the school in Orion. Steady as a climber on a mountain,

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he worked his way to a scholarship at the Poly in Zurich, and from that to Harvard, where Laplong, the great physicist, invited him after a visit to Zurich." She sighed. "And the rest of the story belongs to the world, I suppose, but all that made him, all the sunlight of love that grew him, all the faith and belief that made him strong, that belongs to this place, to this chalet, to Cooney."

"And to you," I said gently. "When did Cooney die?"

"Five years ago. His body lies down in the graveyard, but—"

She looked at the chair by her hand. There was nobody sitting there. But I did not feel it was a vacant chair. I pulled the letter from my pocket and looked at the scrawled signature.

"Yes, 'Matthew,' but it looks more like an equation than a signature. I will have something to tell your son when I answer this letter, and something to tell my son."

"Did not Matty tell you he came from Orion, when he wrote to you here?"

"The letter followed me from Paris. He did not know I was here. It was only chance that I came to Orion. I have not met your son. The letter comes because my son is staying with him. But now of course I shall meet Matthew, the next time I go over to America."

The light was gold and fading on the peaks, and she looked up at the sky. "Come," she said; "I always go and say good night to the old jaunting car before I settle down for the evening."

She was very straight and proud as she walked round the chalet with me, and then we stood in silence looking at the old jaunting car. Then she pointed at a great white rock in the corner of the field. Four old horseshoes were hanging on pegs on the rock.

"That is where old Paddy is buried."

The evening was so full of light and feeling that I could not say anything. She went over and rubbed her hand on the shaft of the car, and she spoke in a dreaming way. "When Matty got the Nobel prize, he came down here from Stockholm. I wondered if he knew all that Cooney had done for him, if he realised what great love and faith had nourished him. Then Matty looked at the old car a long time and he said, 'All this figuring to get a ship to a star. But my old dad knew his way without any figuring at all.'

"It was the first time I saw Matty cry since he was a child. His tears blessed me. I put my cheek on his and let his tears flow down with mine. I had peace then. All the love was there alive and going on, going on, for ever—"

I took her hand to lead her back, and the light was all brimming and moist in the evening.

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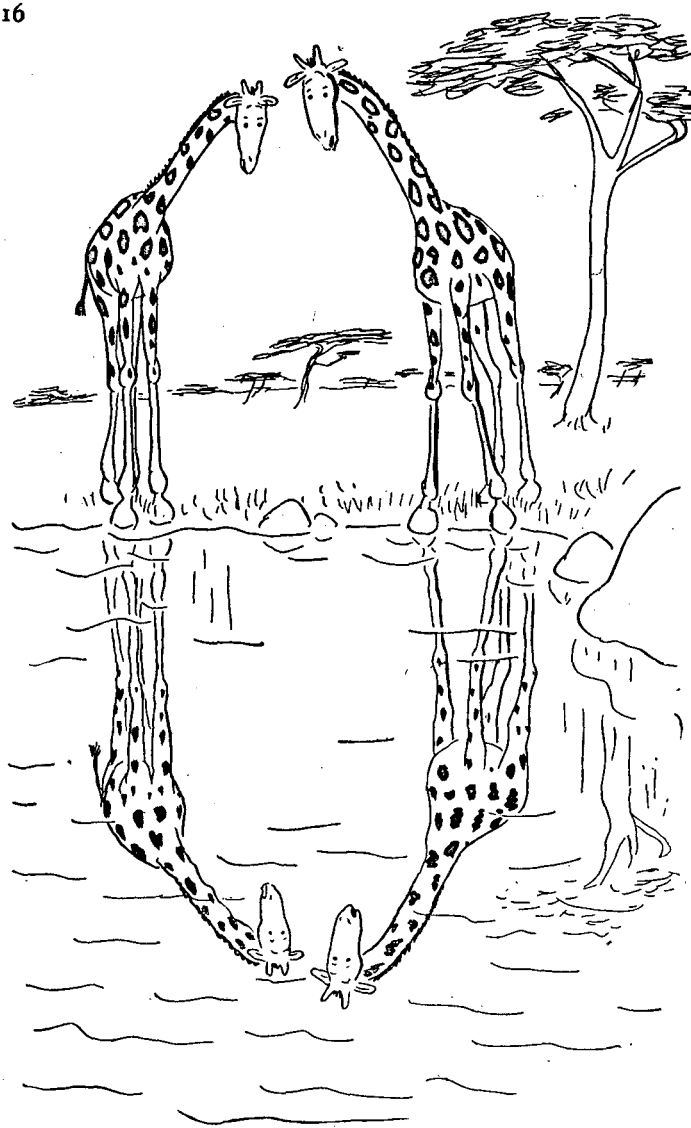

"Let's face it. Mother Nature goofed."

Drawing by Robt. Day

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BLIND MAN'S BLUFF

For him, there was but one way left

BY RUPERT ABBS

WHEN Lenoir went over the sombre grey walls of Blois prison, the alert was prompt, and coded red. That colour meant immediate turn-out for the police force of the entire department, the use of tracker dogs, and the organisation of a rigid network of road-blocks; it meant the deployment, through the endless rocks, gullies, and scrub of the mountains, of weary and near-mutinous Army units who inquired bitterly why the gendarmerie could not manage their own affairs. It meant that Lenoir was dangerous, and was armed.

Below, in the village of Arentes, they needed no warning. They knew Lenoir.

Henri Blanchard, white stick tapping his way down the cobbled street, heard Cajou call him from behind. The Inspector's voice was sharp with the weight of worry and responsibility.

"Twenty-four hours!" he complained. "Not a sign or a sound of the man."

"He will be difficult to catch, that one," observed Blanchard. "Strong, cunning, living in the mountains until he knows them as we do this street; swift and silent in his ways of killing . . ."

"Pah!" exclaimed Cajou. "The Resistance has much to answer for, training such a man in those methods."

"True," Blanchard agreed. "Yet necessary at the time. And not all of those in the organisation went the way of Lenoir."

Cajou glanced at the sensitive face behind the dark glasses.

"My pardon," he apologised. "I come, of course, from the south, where things were—less difficult. I was forgetting that you, too, were of the Resistance."

"A very minor member," murmured Blanchard. "A messenger, no more. With these eyes—"

"With those eyes, the best wine-taster in France," Cajou declared. "One doubts whether even you, given the distractions of sight, would have the concentration, the delicate palate, the sense of bouquet that have made you famous."

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"Affliction has its compensations," Blanchard admitted modestly.

They were at the entrance to the grotto now, the cave which was used communally to store most of the wine produced in the district. Natural in origin, with a multitude of narrow passages and fissures penetrating, it was said, miles into the mountainside, at the village end it had been widened, the floor partly levelled, and electric light installed. Here, among the myriad bottles in their rough wooden racks that stretched far into the gloomy unlighted depths of the cave, Henri worked as a kind of general custodian and resident expert, ensuring that the bottles, once properly stored, remained undisturbed, and giving advice, when required, on matters of blending and bouquet.

"A fine lock," Cajou commented with professional interest, as Blanchard turned the enormous key. "A century old, one would say—as massive as the mountain itself."

"These caves have been in use for generations," Blanchard agreed. "During the war the Germans used them for storing ammunition." He chuckled reflectively. "We used them too, we of the Resistance. There were other entrances up on the mountain, tiny fissures through which a man could wriggle, if he knew where they led—and if he had the courage. It was months before the Boche found out that they were supplying us with ammunition and stores."

"And then?" asked Cajou.

"Oh, of course, they shot the major in charge and blew up every crevice they could find. But by then it did not matter. We had removed enough to our own mountain stores to last for years. Almost the only stuff left here was left because it was the wrong calibre for our weapons!"

Later, alone in the cool caverns, he thought again of those Resistance days. Life had been good then, he reflected, despite discomforts and perpetual dangers; there had been a sense of unity, of a mutual aim worthy of a mutual effort. A common bond between himself and the others: Lenoir, with his strength and ruthlessness; Brume, swift and silent as a fox in the mountains; old Père Cadan, with a brain as keen as a knife behind his venerable whiskers—so many of them. And Marie . . .

Now all that was behind, and there remained only the dull routine of tending wines. There was that batch from the Châteauneuf that he had stored a month ago, deep in the chill of one of the unlighted tunnels. Perhaps it would be sweating . . .

In his crevice between the bottle rack and the wall, Lenoir moved uncomfortably as the damp chill struck through his bones.

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He must make a move soon, he thought, before cold and hunger drained away his strength. Already he was feeling the dragging effects of twenty-four hours without food.

Tonight, then. Away from this cursed cold and darkness, where a man had to feel his way inch by inch along the walls, with nothing but an old, half-forgotten memory to guide him. A man was less than a man here; a man was a mole. Tonight. The door, no matter how stout, could be forced from the inside; there must be picks and crowbars stored somewhere near the entrance. Outside there would be fresh, clean air, stars, and *space*; he would stand in the open, a strong man with a will for freedom, and a gun in his hand.

Pity that fool of a guard had been only half-stunned, and had tried to get the gun back. Pity, too, that his own aim, in those few hectic moments, had been so wild. Three bullets for one man . . .

He became alert. Someone was coming down the passage, the footsteps confident and unhesitating. He flattened himself closer to the wall, lest any light should fall on him.

The footsteps came on, but there was no light. They stopped by the rack where he hid, and he forced himself to breathe shallowly and silently. Someone was there who could see in this clinging darkness, see without a light.

Bottles in the rack above were being lifted and replaced. The man was humming to himself, unconcerned by the darkness. Blanchard, of course; blind Blanchard. Lenoir felt the contagion of the man's easy confidence, and relaxed, easing his cramped limbs as the chill struck again.

The gun in his hand touched the rock as he moved, making the merest shadow of a sound. He held his breath. The humming had stopped.

Out of the darkness came Blanchard's voice. "You there, Lenoir!"

It was a statement, not a question. Blanchard *knew*. But if one lay still and silent he might think he had been mistaken.

He froze, scarcely breathing. Again Blanchard's voice echoed hollowly through the cave. "You *are* there, Lenoir, there behind the bin. I can *feel* you there!"

The voice, Lenoir felt certain, was farther away now. Blanchard had moved towards the entrance, no doubt to raise the alarm. Somehow he must locate him. After all, there were three bullets still left in the gun . . .

No point now in remaining silent. He raised his own voice, hoping that the echoes might cover any sound as he slid along the wall behind the bin.

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"Blanchard, you are right. I *am* here. I need your help."

"Help?" Blanchard sounded incredulous, almost amused. Surely he had moved again, away from the entrance? "You, Lenoir, of all people, to need help? Why?"

"My leg. I think it's broken." Get the fool closer, pinpoint the position of his voice. Meanwhile, slide silently round the end of the rack, so as to have an open field of fire.

Blanchard's voice, when he spoke again, came from behind, and seemed very close. "You ask for *my* help?"

Lenoir spun round and fired. There was a crash of breaking glass, the reverberating echoes of the shot. Then a long silence, while Lenoir felt the blood throbbing through his temples as he listened for the sound of a movement or a groan.

"An error, Lenoir." Suddenly, the voice again. But much farther off. Blanchard had retreated into the depths of the passage. Now he must pass Lenoir to reach the entrance, and safety.

Lenoir moved out into the passage, touching his way along the racks in the direction of the voice, feeling again the keen-edged thrill of being the pursuer.

"You were always so, Lenoir. One who thought that strength and a gun made a man." Blanchard had moved again, deeper into the passage, and Lenoir followed, feeling along the wall now that they were beyond the last of the racks.

"A big man, are you not, Lenoir? A man to be followed and feared. But inside you, what? A rotten hollowness, a nothingness where there should have been strength. When the test came you betrayed your comrades to save your own cowardly skin."

Keep him talking. Follow the voice. Get near enough for another shot. Lenoir felt the wall suddenly curve away from his outstretched fingers, stood in the black void of what he sensed must be a junction of tunnels, and knew a moment of panic as his sense of direction disappeared.

"I was tortured," he said, and waited, trembling in the damned nerve-wracking, directionless darkness. When he heard the voice again, and could move forward, a wave of relief swept through him. God, he must not lose that voice!

"Not you, Lenoir. You did not wait for the torture. You gave them the names they asked for. But the others, those whose names you gave—they were tortured: Brume, old Père Cadan, and the rest. And Marie—do you remember Marie, Lenoir?"

Nearer, now, the voice. Lenoir slid silently forward, his gun ready.

"I would have killed you that day when I came back from

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my mission, but you were already gone on more work for your masters. But *they* were still there—their bodies—there in the square, where the Germans had left them as a warning to others. I felt their poor tortured faces; I felt her long, soft hair—Remember her hair, Lenoir?"

Another junction, another moment of near-panic as he stood trembling, the nerves of his body tingling in his effort to orientate himself. And a sudden, chilling thought—Blanchard killed, how would he, Lenoir, find his way back through this maze of tunnels to the entrance?

"Blonde," he said, forcing his voice to remain steady. "Blonde, with a touch of auburn."

"So they told me." Blanchard's voice was quiet, and very close. Lenoir felt cold sweat forming on his face. He had a desire to do something, anything, to relieve the intolerable sensation of impotence, of being lost and adrift in a sea of blackness. He forced himself to be calm. Blanchard must be very near now.

A sound, not two yards away. A loose stone. Again . . . He fired, working the trigger in a sudden ecstasy of action, squeezing even after the hammer had clicked again and again on empty chambers. Then he waited, hearing only his own heavy breathing in the empty darkness.

The voice—Oh God, from behind, this time! He whirled, feeling terror mount.

"An empty gun now, Lenoir. Just you and I alone in the darkness. But I have the neck from a broken bottle, one of those shattered by your first bullet. Do you remember what a weapon a broken bottle can be in the hands of a man without pity?"

Blanchard was moving again. Lenoir struggled to pinpoint the position of his voice, to rush him, take advantage of superior strength and weight.

"And the darkness, Lenoir, is my ally. I can move in it freely; it is my normal day. But you . . . I can *feel* you there, as surely as if I had sight. Did you know that doctors have measured the blind man's sense of awareness of an obstacle in his path? Twelve feet, they found it averaged. Through the skin of the face and of the hands we feel . . ."

Lenoir leapt towards the sound of the circling voice. His face smashed against rock, and the gun fell clattering from his hand. He lay there, feeling blood flow, and Blanchard laughed.

"Nor is there only skin-sense, my brave Lenoir. I can hear you, also. I can hear you breathing. I can hear your footsteps even when you tread, as you think, so softly. Did it never occur to you that, to a blind man, *everyone's* shoes creak? I can even hear the pounding of your heart—"

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Lenoir rushed at him, crashing against the rock, picking himself up and plunging desperately again, feeling his brain reel with the pain and the sensation of being trapped, charging madly and hopelessly as exhaustion mounted and the voice went relentlessly on.

"Even the rustle of your clothes, I can hear. Your heart—it is racing now. You are in terror, here in the dark with me . . ."

With a cry, Lenoir leapt again, meeting no obstacle this time, stumbling and reeling desperately down the passage to get away from the voice. But it followed, never more than a few yards away.

"I can smell you, too, Lenoir. Yet another sense that we blind cultivate—another weapon. I can smell your sweat—the sweat of a frightened man who knows he is about to die . . ."

Sobbing, Lenoir tripped and fell on the hard, tearing stones. His hand groped forward along the path and felt nothing. Through the terror that gripped his brain he lay there, incapable of movement or thought; while the voice continued inexorably.

"The drop—you have found it, then? Do you know what passage we are in? How many forks we have followed, how many turns we have made? Do you think that you could retrace your steps, even without me here to stop you? Here, with the bottle in my hand, and the memory of that soft hair . . .

"There are many kinds of death, Lenoir, a kind of death for every kind of man. But the coldest, most comfortless death of all—that comes when the desire for life is dead within you, when body and mind are broken and maimed, and there is nowhere any hope. Then the cold kiss of the knife is as welcome as the kiss of a lover.

"I was told, by some who saw it, that those in the market-place prayed to their guards for that ultimate caress. *She* prayed, with the others. And for hours it did not come.

"How long will it be, Lenoir, before *you* beg for the clean, sharp ending that I have in my hand . . .?"

Inspector Cajou shone his torch down into the abyss, lighting up Lenoir's broken body sixty feet below. Then he flashed it round the edge of the hole, and whistled in surprise.

"Why in the name of heaven did he leap?" he marvelled. "There's a narrow path along this side."

"I know," said Blanchard. "But not for Lenoir. For him, there was but one way left."

In the glare of the Inspector's torch his face was drawn, weary.

"I know how he felt," he mused. "I felt it myself, years ago, in the market-place. Everything worth having, gone . . .

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Lenoir no longer had his strength and his pride; and there was nothing else. At the mercy of a blind man— what else could he do? How could he know that those extra-sensory gifts that terrified him so much are only present when the mind is calm? That in the grip of fear and anger I was as lost in the dark as he?"

He smiled shakily at Cajou.

"What an end for such a man!" he said. "A man like Lenoir!"

© Rupert Abbs 1962

LIFE WITH FATHER

Before my father's return [from work], the whole house would spring into activity. Every member of the family would be busy tidying, dusting, rearranging everything. The house had to be in the strictest order: the shoes tidily arranged; the doors of every cupboard shut; the flowers in the garden watered; the children's hair combed; the clothes of every member of the family changed; the tumbler put next to the water-jug, which was not to have its handle turned towards the wall; the broom put in its corner; the peg on the hanger for his overcoat completely cleared.

He would dismount from the donkey in front of the door; and, lighting a cigarette, he would wait there for a while, so that the whole house would know he was back.

But there was no need for this, because the donkey would start braying as soon as it had reached the corner of the street, in order to announce his arrival.

My mother would meet him in the hall, and together they would go upstairs. None of us would go near him; he himself would call us, one by one; he would kiss us, caress and reprimand us, and then, send us away . . .

In the summer, my father used to spend long hours in our garden, by the side of a big rose-bush near the well.

Early in the morning a small basket would be lowered into the well. This would contain a small bottle of rakki, some vegetables and fruit. As soon as my father sat down the basket would be raised from the well, and my mother would herself arrange its contents on a table placed under the rose-bush.

One of my sisters would take off my father's shoes and replace them with a pair of slippers.

He would stretch out and, taking hold of each branch of the rose-bush, he would pull each big, dark-red rose, one by one, right up to his nose, and smell it.

VAHAN TOTOVENTS, *Scenes from an Armenian Childhood*

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Tight Lines

THE burning ambition to become a fisherman was implanted in Tom by Uncle Ned's sagas of fishing adventures in different parts of the world while touring with his own plays. As soon as the boy was old enough to have a mind of his own Uncle Ned was established as his hero and the disparaging things said about him by the aunts made his hero-worship all the fiercer.

The aunts had even suggested that Uncle Ned was no great shakes as an actor until Queen Victoria had been graciously pleased to praise him. The truth was they were jealous and had reason to be, for they were such ordinary people and he was the most marvellous person alive. Talk pillared from him like a flame, but they were never warmed by it as Tom was, and sat with hunched shoulders in chilly disapproval.

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By ROLAND PERTWEE

Once, when describing a fisherman as a traveller towards the stars, armed with a magic wand and a basketful of hope, Tom had seen them exchange glances as if such talk was silly and extravagant instead of wonderful and perfectly true. For Uncle Ned took you with him to the places he talked about, and Tom remembered an account of guddling a trout in a Highland burn which had been so vivid that he had felt the cold creep up his bare arm as he dipped it lower and lower into the water.

It was hard to believe how anyone could dare run down a man who had caught a shark on rod and line in Sydney Harbour and Tom stood up and told them so, for it is no good having a hero to worship if you are not willing to defend him. He had been almost speechless with rage, but when they actually hinted it was because of Uncle Ned's " terrible weakness " that Aunt Lily had died of a broken heart, he could have murdered them.

". . . and what do they mean, Dad, " he cried indignantly, " about him having just come out of *that place* as if he'd been in prison? "

" Eh? Oh nothing really. Like many actors, he's highly-strung, you know, and has to rest from time to time."

Ages ago Uncle Ned had promised to take Tom fishing at the Welsh Harp on his eleventh birthday and at long last that day was in sight. It would be his first attempt to catch a fish, for his father and Aunt Celia, who, since his mother's death, had run the house, preferred to spend holidays in places with pavements both sides of the street. But Tom was no stranger to the gentle art, having devoured every fishing book he could lay his hands on and knowing the catalogues of three tackleists by heart.

When the long awaited day came he woke before dawn, and it was barely seven when he tiptoed downstairs hoping to get out of the house without disturbing anyone. But a board creaked and Aunt Celia called from her room to ask if he was really going.

" Of course I am! "

" Very well, but don't be too disappointed if everything isn't as wonderful as you expect it to be."

It was just the sort of thing she would say, but while riding his bicycle to Uncle Ned's house, Tom saw a sweep and cancelled out the jinx by wishing him good morning.

Mrs. Bird, who opened the front door, was so surprised to

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see Tom's glowing face that she said, " And what are you doing here? "

" It's the day he's taking me fishing at the Welsh Harp."

Mrs. Bird clicked her tongue. " Well, he never said nothing to me and there hasn't been a sound out of him yet. Better pop upstairs and if you *are* going give me a shout and I'll put up some sandwiches."

Uncle Ned's bicycle, with fishing-rods tied to the frame seen by Tom through the open conservatory door, dispelled an appalling uncertainty, and with a gasp of relief he shot upstairs two at a time.

The portrait of Aunt Lily, with its sad, reproachful expression, looked down on Uncle Ned as Tom's arrival roused him from sleep. The tousled head on the pillow was a magnificent piece of human wreckage. Its features bore scars from losing battles fought against himself, but his eyes had not lost their brightness and a twisted smile was constant at the corners of his mouth.

" Well and well indeed! " he exclaimed, wondering what on earth Tom wanted at such an hour, but he did not ask in case it was something he ought to have remembered and hadn't.

Illumination came when Tom said, " Do you know it's exactly nine hundred and seventy-two days since you promised to take me fishing on my eleventh birthday? "

To give himself leisure to grasp the implications of this remark, Uncle Ned quoted, " Also time running into years . . ." But the situation was awkward, for he had arranged to read the first act of his new play to Ellen Terry that morning. However one mustn't disappoint a child and anyway he hadn't written a word of it.

From under what was once Aunt Lily's pillow he took a flat bottle containing the medicine which did him most good on waking. Its effects were beneficent for he said, " We couldn't have a better day for it. Sunlight and big romping clouds! On just such a morning, and me not much older than you are yourself, I took a seven-pound bream from a Kentish lake with a brandling. A lively, striped, irresistible brandling! Smelled like the devil it did—brandlings always do. To hell with everything that creeps and crawls. Where shall we fish, young fellow? "

" You said the Welsh Harp and I saw you'd tied some rods on to your bike."

Uncle Ned seemed surprised. " Have I? That's good. Get the donkey work over and done with the night before—rods, reels, ground bait and the rest of it! No excuse then to forget anything."

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Roland Pertwee started life as a painter, winning a Royal Academy scholarship at the age of sixteen and later studying in Paris. But the theatre had always fascinated him, and was fast becoming a rival passion. Acting became his life.

In 1915 on the eve of being posted to France, he was delighted to learn that his first short story was to be published. It was the beginning of his third career, and the one he decided to adopt. With a shrewd, sardonic eye, he created character after character. He has produced twenty-five novels; film scripts; plays—including "Pink String and Sealing Wax"—and several collections of short stories.

Yawning prodigiously, he put his feet on the floor and, while Tom was absent telling Mrs. Bird they were going all right, he collected from the wardrobe a tweed suit that was a chronicle of riverside disasters and triumphs.

When Tom returned he was pulling a shirt over his head.

"First fish I ever caught," he said, "was a rascally gudgeon by the Pont Neuf in Paris. I saw the float slide under, grabbed the rod and struck. Fellow it belonged to was talking to a pretty girl, but was back in a flash to catch me a clout on the side of the head. But nothing could rob me of the pride of catching my first fish."

Tom's prophetic, "That's what I'm going to do today, isn't it?" inspired Uncle Ned to declaim, "God's in his heaven—all's right with the world!"

He did not want any breakfast, but told Tom to trundle his bicycle to the street while he made a final check on the tackle. His creel, which was smothered in cobwebs, was taken from a cupboard, and he was regarding it with affection as Mrs. Bird came in to say, "I've given Master Tom your lunches and told him to make sure you eat something."

When she had gone he tiptoed to the bookshelf and, from behind the works of Sir Walter Scott, took a bottle of whisky. He wondered how it had got there—and why. For Lil was dead and there was no one who mattered to have hidden it from. Shaking his head sadly, he dropped it in the creel and thrust a wooden skewer through the loop that held down the lid.

Both tyres of Uncle Ned's bicycle were flat and Tom was busy pumping them up. He had feared they might be punctured, but thank goodness they weren't. The amount of dust that had settled on the fishing-rods during the night was surprising. By the look of them they might have been tied on a year ago.

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From a treetop of the Chelsea street a thrush sang as they rode away and set Tom babbling. "I've been tearing days off a calendar for so long I can hardly believe we've really started. Are you sure you know how to get there?"

Uncle Ned had not done any bicycling for a long time and he did not reply until he got his second breath.

"Quite, quite sure. Like the wild-ass of the desert, I smell water from afar. But take it easy, young fellow. Fatal to arrive too soon. Fish have regular mealtimes the same as you and me. When last I fished the Welsh Harp the luncheon gong sounded at one-thirty and devil a nibble beforehand."

On a bridge spanning the Serpentine he dismounted to study the water.

"To think this was once a lively trout stream frequented by Izaak Walton! And now they've throttled the overflow into a drainpipe passing over the line at Sloane Square. 'To what base uses may we return, Horatio.'"

Tom was burning to get on, but Uncle Ned's memory recaught a rainbow trout in New Zealand which Aunt Lily cooked in a hot spring less than a minute after the fly was taken out of its mouth. He always smiled hard when speaking of Aunt Lily—doing so kept the wobble out of his voice.

On leaving the park, they rode north to Little Venice where, fearing the Regent's Park Canal might provoke another stop, Tom pedalled furiously ahead and dulled his ears against cries of protest from behind.

They joined the Edgware Road near an old-fashioned inn with a bench outside which proved a sure attraction to travellers. Applying his plunger brake, Uncle Ned prescribed gingerpop as the only cure for Tom's crimson and perspiring cheeks.

"So keep your eye on the iron steeds, Venator, while I reveal our plight to mine host."

Letting his bicycle fall into the gutter, he entered the inn wearing a purposeful expression. After a long delay a window behind the bench was opened by a lady with brassy hair and a big bosom, who said, "Ketch 'old, ducky," and thrust a frothing glass into Tom's hand.

She left the window partly open and Tom heard Uncle Ned haranguing a spellbound company, one of which had confessed that he lacked the patience to be a fisherman.

"The patience quotha! Then count yourself lucky for you may become one yet. I've followed the angle all over the world and know that the most valuable asset a fisherman can possess is impatience. For only the impatient angler is never taken unawares. My glass is what, dear? Why, so it is! A double

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whisky, then, and if any of you gentlemen will join me, we will drink to Tight Lines." While drinking the toast "Tight Lines" winks were exchanged over raised tankards.

It was wonderful to have an uncle who could enrapture a company of strangers, but Tom hoped he wouldn't go on doing so indefinitely. It was getting late, there was still a long way to go, and after all this was supposed to be *his* day. If it was true that fish took their midday meal at the same time as mortals, it would be tragic not to arrive until it was over.

Tom was a prey to the creepings of despair when Uncle Ned came out arm-in-arm with a brewer's drayman who wore a tasselled cap of scarlet stockinet.

"This excellent fellow," he announced, "will be passing the Welsh Harp and has offered us a lift. So on to the chariot with these bicycles, Tom, then climb aboard." In setting an example, he barked a shin and cried loudly, "To hell with rat-trap pedals!"

To be perched on a beer barrel and to spank along behind a pair of dappled greys with jingling harness was an unforgettable experience, but Tom had not realised that a brewer's drayman must call at many public houses to replenish stock and take away empties, and even though Uncle Ned insisted on lending a hand while these duties were performed, at least a quarter of an hour's fishing was irredeemably lost at each stop.

"I know you're in a hurry to get there," Uncle Ned whispered confidentially, "but the fellow's being mos' obligin' an' helpful. Matter of *Bushido* t'make some return."

And so the journey dragged on.

Not having a watch, Tom never knew what time they eventually arrived. His memory at that moment was of a stretch of water spread out before him and of tears in Uncle Ned's eyes as he clasped the drayman's hand in a silent farewell.

The drayman himself must have been deeply moved for he took Tom aside: "You want to see 'e comes to no 'arm, son."

When he had driven away, Tom asked eagerly, "Where shall we start? How about that sort of cape over there?"

Uncle Ned shook a fish-wise head. "Right here where we stand," he boomed. "Fished from this spot first time I came to the Harp an' there isn' a better."

"Oh, good! And after lunch may I put up the rods?"

Uncle Ned cautiously lowered himself to the ground.

"B'all means, but no lunch for me. Food dulls the senses." He pointed a wavering forefinger. "See that ripple? That's where I saw a pike gobble up a full-grown moorhen."

"You didn't!" Tom gasped.

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"Without a word of a lie."

"Oh, I wasn't really doubting it, even though fishermen do exaggerate sometimes, don't they?"

Uncle Ned closed his eyes and dreamed aloud. "Half an hour later I had the devil-dog on the bank."

"The same fish, do you mean? With the moorhen inside?"

"I dunno. Must've been. Your Aunt Lil was with me and she loved only beautiful things. Was I the man to gralloch a murderous pike before her? Perish the thought!" And his features twisted into a pattern of grief.

Feeling a bit uncomfortable, Tom asked what he'd caught the pike with.

"Long time ago. Roach—rudd—whassit matter?"

"Suppose I tried to catch one now, then we could put it on a snap tackle and . . ."

But Uncle Ned had risen and was holding up a finger.

"Bait! I'll step across to the pub for some fresh bait."

Tom longed to say, "Please don't. Can't we start with the stuff you packed last night?" But that would have been whining and one doesn't whine at or before someone you worship. So while Uncle Ned steered an uncertain course away from the water, Tom filled in time by taking the rods from the bicycle and shaking them out of their linen cases.

There was no need to be a student of tackleists' catalogues to realise that neither the massive sea rod, with half its rings missing, nor the whippy greenheart with the broken top joint, were ever intended for coarse fishing. Uncle Ned had tied them to his bicycle over a year before, meaning to take them along to be repaired, but his memory had been playing tricks and he'd forgotten all about it.

Tom supposed they were chosen in a fit of absent-mindedness so the only thing to do was botch them up somehow, put on reels, and hope for the best. But even that hope was in vain, for there were no reels in the basket nor any casts nor hooks nor floats nor any single contraption to help a boy catch his first fish at the Welsh Harp. Apart from a whisky bottle and some moth-eaten mayflies, the basket contained nothing but a creaking "I told you so" from the aunts, "and now perhaps you'll realise what this hero of yours is worth."

An hour went by before Uncle Ned returned. He was propped up by a potboy who told Tom, "'E won't never ride that gridiron in a munf of Sundays."

Uncle Ned stretched himself luxuriously upon the grass, mumbling something about not leaving it too late or Lil would be worried.

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The day for which Tom had waited for nearly three years was over before it started and there was a red-hot coal in his throat as he put the rods back in their cases.

Uncle Ned was still slumbering heavily in the late afternoon when a man, wearing a jaunty cap with pearl buttons on it, stopped nearby to light a short clay pipe. As he was carrying a lot of fishing impedimenta, Tom asked whether he'd had any luck.

" If I 'ad two more I'd of 'ad three," said the man sombrely. Then, seeing something was amiss, was quick to ask what it was.

" My uncle isn't well and I don't know how to get him home."

There is a brotherhood among anglers, so the man with the pearly cap put them and their bicycles into his vegetable cart. In the event Uncle Ned was safely delivered through his own front door where he stirred himself to remark, " Wun'ful day . . . mus' repeat it."

Of course the aunts *would* be there when Tom got home and it needed all the guts he had left to face them with an air of victory. Having been reproved for being so late, Aunt Jessie playfully observed, " You seem very pleased with yourself. You'll be telling us next that you caught something."

That was Tom's cue for becoming a true fisherman.

" I should just think we did," he replied defiantly, " including a socking great pike which had gobbled up a moorhen just before I landed him."

This apocryphal story was never denied and, with the passing of years, it became Tom's proudest reminiscence. But bearing in mind how long and earnestly he had looked forward to his first day's fishing this is not surprising for, apart from any question of loyalty, it was pleasanter to think of it as it might have been than as it was.

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WITH A KICK IN IT!

That summer sea-bathing had been prescribed for me. My red flannel nightgowns were made into bathing dresses (grown-ups wore bathing dresses made of thick blue serge with patterns of white or red braid.) I was allowed a few minutes of delightful splash and paddle, and then I was seized by a horrible old " baigneur " who carried me into the sea and dipped me, head under, three times. He shouted all the while at the top of his voice: " N'ayez pas peur, la petite M'zelle, n'ayez pas peur." To this I screamed back " Les Anglaises n'ont *jamais* peur! " and kicked as hard as I could until he deposited me back in the bathing hut with my *bonne*.

LOUISA KATHLEEN HALDANE, *Friends and Kindred*

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After a short interval Rat reappeared staggering under a fat, wicker luncheon-basket . . .

" What's inside it? " asked the Mole, wriggling with curiosity.

" There's cold chicken inside it," replied the Rat briefly; " coldtonguecoldhamcoldbeefpickledgherkinssaladfrenchrolls cresssandwidgespottedmeatgingerbeerlemonadesodawater—"

" O stop, stop," cried the Mole in ecstasies: " This is too much! " KENNETH GRAHAME, *The Wind in the Willows*

Outsiders

Kerchief in hand I saw them stand
In every kerchief lurk'd a lunch;
When they unfurl'd them, it was grand
To watch bronzed men and maidens crunch
The sounding celery-stick, or ram
The knife into the blushing ham.

Dash'd the bold fork through pies of pork;
O'er hard-boil'd eggs the saltspoon shook;
Leapt from its lair the playful cork:
Yet some there were, to whom the brook
Seem'd sweetest beverage, and for meat
They chose the red root of the beet.

C. S. CALVERLEY

In the Lap of Luxury

Lunch-time came and we assembled hungrily on the beach . . . A fire blazed, the food was piled on the rugs, and the wine fetched from the sea's edge where it had been put to cool. Larry pulled his corner of the rug up the dune so that he could stretch full-length surrounded by the white trumpets of the lilies . . .

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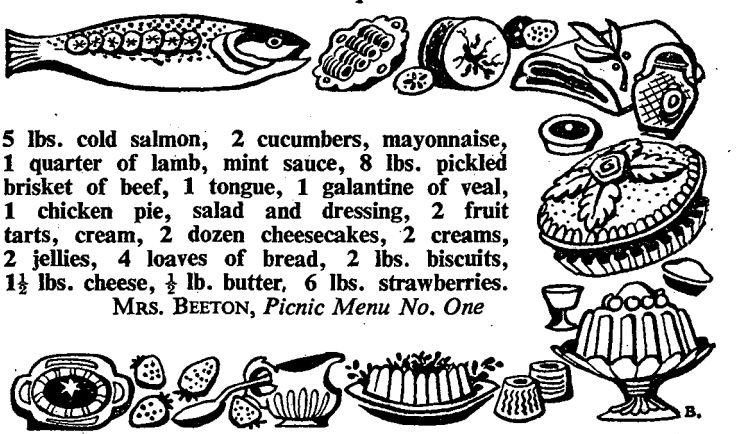
" What a heavenly place! " mumbled Larry through a mouthful of food, lying back luxuriously among the shining flowers. " I feel this place was designed for me. I should like to lie here forever, having food and wine pressed into my mouth by groups of naked and voluptuous dryads. Eventually, of course, over the centuries, by breathing deeply and evenly I should embalm myself with this scent, and then one day my faithful dryads would find me gone, and only the scent would remain. Will someone throw me one of those *delicious*-looking figs? "

GERALD DURRELL, *My Family and Other Animals*

Unhampered!



5 lbs. cold salmon, 2 cucumbers, mayonnaise, 1 quarter of lamb, mint sauce, 8 lbs. pickled brisket of beef, 1 tongue, 1 galantine of veal, 1 chicken pie, salad and dressing, 2 fruit tarts, cream, 2 dozen cheesecakes, 2 creams, 2 jellies, 4 loaves of bread, 2 lbs. biscuits, 1½ lbs. cheese, ½ lb. butter, 6 lbs. strawberries.

MRS. BEETON, *Picnic Menu No. One*

Wery Welcome

" Weal pie," said Mr. Weller soliloquising, as he arranged the eatables on the grass. " Wery good thing is weal pie, when you know the lady as made it, and is quite sure it an't kittens . . . Tongue; well, that's a wery good thing when it an't a woman's. Bread—knuckle of ham, reg'lar picture—cold beef in slices, wery good. What's in them stone jars, young touch-and-go? "

" Beer in this one," replied the boy, taking from his shoulder a couple of huge stone bottles fastened together by a leathern strap—" cold punch in t'other." . . .

" And a wery good notion of a lunch it is, take it altogether . . ."

CHARLES DICKENS, *Pickwick Papers*

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A picnic should be composed principally of young men and young women; but two or three old male folks may be admitted, if *very* good-humoured; a few pleasant children—; and one—only one, dear old lady: to her let the whole commissariat department be intrusted by the entire assembly beforehand . . . for so shall nothing we want be left at home. It is not "fun" to find one's self without mint-sauce to his cold lamb; nobody who is properly constituted, enjoys lobster without fresh butter; and when you are fond of salad, it is not cheerful to find the bottle of dressing, which was intrusted to young Master Brown, has broken in his filthy pocket: these things all occur, unless we have our (one) dear old lady . . . Observe her little plump birds in their beds of aspic jelly; her little bottle of cayenne pepper! Mark each individual cruet as it gleams forth from its separate receptacle! Look at the salt-box! Look at the corkscrew! Bless her dear old heart! she has forgotten nothing. ANON

Delights of a Picnic

You are sitting on stones with rheumaticky bones, and a sandwich with egg in is handed you,
Though the yolk, for a cert, drops a blob on your shirt, and as non-U the others have branded you . . .
There are old Mrs. Heath with her spit-and-click teeth, Mum and Dad, and the kids, and a Cousin,
And they all sit around on the horrible ground, tongues a-wagging nineteen to the dozen;
But you feel very old, or your back is too cold, and long-leggety beasties are biting you,
Or you're suffering stings from mosquito-like things that are dancing but hardly delighting you;
You are loath to be rude, but you're hating the food, which is certainly unsatisfying;
Mainly damp-looking lettuce, which felons in fetters might feed on if very near dying;
There is molten ice-cream, which you do not esteem—when you're dry there is milk going curdly,
For the tool isn't here that they open the beer with, you've left it behind most absurdly;
Then the children get hurt, lie and howl in the dirt, and you shout at 'em, smack 'em, and shake 'em,
And you swear that again (*walking* home in the rain) for a picnic you never will take 'em!

J. A. LINDON

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SIN

By EDWARD McCARTHY

AS THE young priest approached the cottage he became more and more nervous. At the top of the frozen boreen he paused, breathing hard. His lean face was pink-tinged from the wind; behind their octagonal spectacles his soft eyes watered.

On his left, the valley wall rose sheer, narrowing pyramid-like to a sharp peak. Now, in mid spring, the peak was white with snow that glittered in the weak early-morning sunlight. It reminded the priest of a thumb raised jubilantly in the air, and he found himself thinking with a strange bitterness of the contrast with his own deep pessimism. Over the peak the sky was heavy and grey, lead-coloured, with here and there a rook gliding on the wind on still wings. The valley, a dried-up river, was long and narrow, and disappeared twisting among the jagged hills. But where the priest stood now the road stopped, widening to a manure-stained yard, at the last small cottage, the last small crazily-bounded fields.

Looking across the yard at the cottage, he noticed that the whitewash was the colour of manure, far darker than when he had seen it last, three months ago, and he noticed too that the hedge round the haggart was higher and lanker, growing wild. There was a hole in the zinc roof of the red hayshed, the strawrick was unprotected against rain. There was no sign of life anywhere in the vicinity of the cottage, as far as the priest could make out, not smoke even, or the morning cluck cluck of hens—only the bare-boughed elm by the back door swaying and creaking in the wind.

When he knocked on the closed door, footsteps pattered on the floor of the loft and a murmur of voices troubled the silence. He thought of her, sitting up in bed, her bosom hardly covered, all that sinful whiteness, and her longlashed dark eyes staring with anxiety into old Mike's anxious face. Nonsense, he thought, turning towards the lower valley, how could they know it's me?

Down there, the valley widened out and flattened, where the road to the town passed, deep-sunk between fuchsia hedges,

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and the fields were bigger, the grass richer and greener, and there were trees, clumps of them, around the farmhouses. Then the hills smoothened and faded into the flat land, and there was a wide green plain, with many trees, stretching to the town on the shore of the sea.

" Good morning, Father."

Soft though the voice was, it made him start. He swung round. The old man was standing in the open doorway, staring at him with blue steady eyes.

" Good, ah, good morning, Mike. How are you? "

" Fairly good, Father, thank God." It was a deep yet gentle voice, uncommonly soft for a peasant.

The priest gripped the linings of his overcoat pockets. He was surprised to find the old man so unchanged; had thought that the deterioration in the state of the farm would turn out merely to be a reflection of the moral degradation of the man. But of degradation, moral or otherwise, there were not the least traces on old Mike's face; and it worried the priest to see that his old friend's eyes were still as bright and unwavering as the last time he had seen them—or at any other time for that matter since he had known him.

Full of premonition, he hesitated, coughed into a raised hand, and at last said, awkwardly, " And Nora? Is she, ah, well? "

" She is, Father." Mike's tone was calm and natural; he gave no sign that he guessed—knew—why the priest was here.

" I'm glad to hear it," the priest said, lightly smiling.

Hypocrite, he thought. You'd be a sight more glad to learn that she'd left him, taken to the roads once more. He was still shaken by Mike's bright appearance, and deeply disheartened at the possible outcome of his mission.

They were silent, each trying to think of something to say, old friends facing one another across a rift that had opened between them, fearful lest they should hurt one another. In the silence the wind blew loud through the hedge and through the branches of the naked elm, and in the morning air, high, a rook glided on the wind where it blew round the high sunlit peak. Light quick footsteps descended the stairs; a girl's voice softly called, " What is it, Mike? Is something up? "

The old man, quick-glancing at the priest, said softly over his shoulder, " 'Tis all right, Nora. 'Tis only Father Mulcahy on a little visit to us."

There was a gasp inside the cottage, then a light, " Oh! " and footsteps hurriedly mounting the stairs. A door banged.

" She's in her nightdress yet," said Mike by way of explanation, with lowered eyes.

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" Yes, yes," said the priest, hastily nodding his head.

" She'll be down after a couple of minutes."

" Will she? Ah, good. Good."

Again the wind blew loud in the silence. The old man shuffled on the threshold, then said, " Well, Father, won't you be coming in and taking the weight off your feet?"

" Well now," said the priest, " that's a good idea, Mike. I think I will."

" Nora'll make us a cup of tea when she comes down."

" Will she? Yes, that would be nice."

" 'Tis early you're on the road, isn't it?" said Mike as he opened the shutters of the kitchen's only window, letting in the morning light. In the narrow strip of the kitchen that it brightened, dust particles floated shining.

" Well, ah, as a matter of fact, yes, I suppose so," said the priest, and added with a bleak smile, " The early bird is supposed to be the successful bird."

Mike looked away through the window as he sat down. From where he stood over him, the priest could make out the pained expression on his face, and he grew hot with shame for the levity of his remark.

" Mind you, ah, some birds, early and all as they are, never, ah, never catch anything."

Mike continued to look through the window. After a moment he turned and said calmly, " Won't you sit down, Father? You must be fagged out after your climb."

" Yes, I think I will, just for a few minutes," the priest said, drawing a chair from under the long bare table. Now that his long climb was over and he could at last relax—physically at least—he felt his face hot and flushed. His faux pas had made matters worse.

" Windy weather we're having," he said, to cover his unease with words.

" It is, faith," said Mike. " I must say 'tis you're the brave man to come venturing up here in a wind like that."

The priest shrugged. " A breath of wind never did anyone any harm."

" Still," grunted Mike. He rose and, crossing to the high dresser, took down his pipe and tobacco and matches. The priest lit a cigarette and, smoking with quick nervous drags, looked around the kitchen, at the colourless damp walls, the rickety dresser on which were piled old yellowed newspapers and mouldy books, where a jug and half a dozen cracked cups hung from nails above a pile of cracked plates and odd saucers, at the shotgun on its rough-and-ready rack on the wall over the hearth, and

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beside it an old framed photograph of a man and a woman sitting together under a tree.

He stared at the photograph, trying to distinguish the features of Mike's father, his own father's lifelong friend. He knew the photograph well; he had first seen it on the wall of a living-room of the house his father took when they left the country.

The old man was filling his pipe. Sunlight from the window fell lightly on his grey hair and on one side of his face. The priest in silence watched the movements of his knobby fingers as they broke and pushed the tobacco into the bowl of the pipe.

" How's the Canon? " asked Mike casually, without looking up.

The priest flung his cigarette-stub into the great open fireplace, leaning forward and away from the table in order to hide his surprise at the question. Mike was the last person he would expect to inquire after the Canon. The nerve of the man. Of course he was pretending complete innocence of the reason for the priest's presence here this windy morning. He was defending by attack as it were. Asking about the Canon. A breath of anger stirred the priest's calm, but he answered normally enough.

" Oh, well; very well, in fact. He sends, ah, he sends yourself and Nora his, ah, greetings."

A little reminder.

" That he do," said Mike, smiling a little and, sighing, added, " He's a good man, the Canon is. He did great good throughout the length and breadth of the parish."

" He's half a saint," the priest said with enthusiasm, feeling as he said it a vague increase in his own confidence. Didn't he represent the Canon? Had in point of fact been expressly sent here by him, the long arm of goodness militant reaching even into the farthest corners where men dwelt, where by the same token sin could rear its ugly head.

Yes, put like that it was simple enough—he was here in order to save two souls. Better get down to it, he told himself, enough of this sentimental tarrying. " Yes," he said, " there's no earthly doubt about it. Only God himself knows the half of what he has done for the people."

" 'Tis a fine thing, isn't it, Father," said Mike quietly, shaking his head in wonder from side to side. " A fine thing, surely."

The priest threw him a sharp glance, but the downturned face wore no expression. He felt himself suddenly upborne on a wave of helplessness. How was he to approach this most delicate mission of his? To break what had become a home?

If only he really knew the man he had to deal with, this old whitehaired man who was his father's friend, and his own; if

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only he could be certain that those pained expressions he had seen were the outward reflections of a true wounded love, or contrariwise, knew that they were not, but were false, the cunning stratagems of a foxlike peasant mind, bent on exploiting his weakness for an old friend—and a friend of a kind—for the continuance of his sinful union.

But how to know such things? Was there ever any knowing such things? Ever any hope of bridging the chasm between two human minds, to know the territories beyond one's own?

He found himself wishing that he had never known old Mike, never as a child been pampered by him, snatched from the ground in great rough hands and flung up high, screaming with joy and fear, into the air, only to fall again into those sure hands and be set, crying to be airborne once more, on the unfriendly common ground. He wished that as a schoolboy he had never climbed up to this forsaken valley to smoke secretly with old Mike by the huge blazing fire. He wished that he were far away from this valley where the wind was always blowing, far away from Mike, from the girl whom he had come to like and trust.

And he realised that he had not been wrong in protesting when he had been sent, temporarily, to serve in his own parish, among his own people, in those rocky lands he knew so well.

Still, that was how things stood, and he had his duty to perform. Of this he kept reminding himself with something approaching panic at the fact that he *had* to remind himself of what should have been most natural to him.

"He's getting on now, of course," he said.

"Yeah." Mike nodded slowly, smoke curling around his face. "A fine old age he's after reaching."

Sincere? False? There was no knowing. All he could do was watch for the least sign, the least word that betrayed the real state of things in the old man's mind and heart. And if he did succeed in knowing, what then? Was not the mere fact of his desiring to know, an admission of his own incapacity to deal with the old man?

"Strange," said Mike softly. "Being old, I mean."

"Yes, I suppose so," said the priest, thinking of the Canon's face, grey, cracked like ancient leather, and of Mike's face before him with the sunlight on it, smooth as a young man's. Surely, if there were sin in this old man's heart, the face would somehow furnish the proof? Maybe; maybe not. If only it were that simple. But it seemed that the heart, like the head, could conceal its reasons.

"You certainly don't seem to mind it much yourself," he said.

"Me?" said Mike. "Me mind it? Father, I welcomes it."

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" But surely, when you were young—"

" Young? When I was young, I didn't know my ass from my elbow—if you'll pardon the vulgar expression, Father."

The priest murmured something inaudible.

Mike bent close to him, his face serious. " I was ignorant of the finest thing in the world, Father. I mean peace. God, when I think of them days when I went gallivanting to the four corners of the land, boozing and carousing and leading the life of a harumscarum.

" I broke my mother's heart with worrying for me. I gave my father a stroke running after me with a stick to beat the hide off me. Ah, Father, don't talk to me about being young. There's a wildness in the young that God nor man couldn't tame. Yes, Father, a great wildness."

Silent, the priest nodded. Thinking: I wonder what's all this in aid of?

Mike leaned closer. " Naturally, Father, this is just between ourselves . . ."

" Naturally," the priest assured him.

Footsteps crossed the floor of the loft. Instinctively, he glanced up.

" She'll be coming down in a jiff now," Mike said.

Was his voice changed? Tinged with apprehension? Were the bright young eyes a shade darker? Cowled in troubled shadow?

A door creaked open upstairs.

" So you see, Father, why old age is welcome to me." Mike was again talking softly, but the priest noticed that his fingers stirred uneasily round the stem of his pipe.

" Still . . ." He frowned his doubt.

And Mike cut in, his voice vibrant, " It is the years, Father, the load of years that bends the back and shrinks the body up, 'tis them same years that makes men of some of us—and who won't welcome the chance of becoming a man at last? I tell you, Father, I was near done for, I was nearly destroyed from the life I was leading, till one morning a few years back, just an ordinary morning and the land waking up, I was standing outside in the haggart when all of a sudden—it hit me like a blow on the back—I realised I was an old man.

" I thought in the beginning I'd go out of my head surely, knowing I was so near to dying, and then bit by bit I was getting used to it, softlike, 'twas getting inside my mind; and another day I was standing in the selfsame patch of the haggart, just standing there looking down the valley towards the sea, and sudden like, I *saw*."

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"Saw?" echoed the priest, interested in spite of his gnawing doubt as to the veracity of all this. "Saw what?"

Mike leaned still closer, so close that the priest could see the pores of his skin. He lowered his voice still more, until it was hardly a whisper.

"I saw the sea. I *saw* it, don't you understand? I looked, and I saw the sea with the waves on its back, and I saw the waves tumbling white on the rocks on the shore, and I looked, and I saw the whole long valley stretching away before me, and the fields in it, and the trees in the fields, and crops growing green and ready to ripen, and the cattle and sheep grazing at peace in the sunshine, and I looked up, and I saw that mountain peak sticking up into the sunshine and the little rocks and stones on its bare sides shining.

"I stood there for hours, Father, just looking around me at things I'd known for years but that I'd never seen, and the more I looked the more I saw, and the more I saw the more I knew away down deep inside in me that at last at the age of sixty-four, I was a man. 'Twas like—like waking up, Father; yeah, waking up after a sleep that lasted years and years and years—'twas like being in a new world."

"Strange," murmured the priest, rubbing his hand along his jaw. "And when did you say this happened?" he asked casually.

"What?" said Mike, straightening. "Oh, I suppose 'twould be in or about two years back. Yeah, 'twould be just two years. I remember because—"

He stopped, flushing.

The priest did not push him further. It was exactly two years since the Canon first got suspicious of old Mike and the young girl he had taken into his house when he found her on the roads deserted by runaway gipsy parents.

Yet, at that time, he thought, they were still sleeping in separate beds. As far as we know. The Canon's informant, an old woman from a nearby hovel, was none too reliable. There was no telling at this juncture precisely when this sad business had begun. Neither was it of any great importance to his purpose.

But he was curious. "Tell me," he said, "was this a temporary thing, or has it been going on ever since? I mean this, ah, seeing."

Mike threw back his head and laughed. "Temporary," he said, and laughed again heartily. "Ah, Father, I can tell you there was nothing temporary about it. No. And if I was to tell you the whole story down to this day, you wouldn't credit my words."

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" I would, Mike," the priest said, thinking with bitterness, Now I'm playing what may or may not be his kind of game. I wasn't brought up in the country for nothing.

" No, no, Father. It don't matter anyway. Haven't I said enough to show you old age can be a blessing? 'Tisn't my confession you're hearing after all . . ."

The priest forced himself to smile.

Light quick footsteps on the uncovered stairs. They both turned. Across the thick gloom of the kitchen they saw her long slim legs come into view between the banisters. Then her body, then her head held high, the black hair tied with a ribbon at her nape. The priest rose.

" Good, ah, good morning, Nora."

" Good morning, Father. Sorry for keeping you so long waiting for a cup of tea. You *will* have a cup of tea, won't you, Father? "

Good God, he thought, can it be the same slip of a girl I saw three months ago? She's a girl no longer, no, but a young blossoming woman of high beauty. Confident of herself and unafraid.

But when he looked directly at her, she lowered her eyes, and the long dark lashes reminded him of soft curtains. He rubbed his hands together with forced joviality.

" There's nothing I'd like better this moment, Nora."

She went past him to the wide hearth, silent in soft slippers, her feet sliding silently over the earth floor, unstockinged, white. Broodingly, he returned to his seat. Mike was busy scraping out his pipe.

It can't go on like this, he thought, watching the girl out of the corner of his eye where she bent over the fire. No, I must get it said. Mike will understand. He'll be hurt at the moment, but later he'll realise that I was only doing my duty, that I was obeying the Canon's orders. And if he does not?

If he does not, it can't be helped.

He bit his lip, hesitated, lit a cigarette, said softly, " Mike . . ."

He felt the girl turning to stare at him, and stopped, confused.

Mike was relighting his pipe. He said between two puffs, " Yes, Father? "

He sucked in his breath. His mouth tasted of bile. " Mike," he said, hearing his voice tremble, " ah, there's a little, ah, matter—you see, ah, now listen to me, Mike, you've got to understand . . ."

He saw the match go out. Mike's terror-stricken eyes rose to his above the smouldering pipe. Get it out, he told himself, now, quick, before you weaken. Avoid his eyes.

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But he could not avoid the eyes, they held his, wide with disbelief and outrage. The Canon has said that you, Mike, and you, Nora . . . Behind him a log fell, loud as a pistol shot in the silence. His courage flowed out of him like water. He felt suddenly empty. He searched wildly through his chaotic mind, and at last said softly, " It's that hayshed of yours, Mike . . ."

The burnt match dropped on to the table. Behind him he heard the girl sigh. Mike, with lowered eyes, said hoarsely, " The hayshed, Father? "

" Yes, Mike: there's a great hole in the roof. I noticed it and I coming in."

" Ah yeah, yeah. The wind did that, Father."

" Yes, I guessed that."

Mike squirmed on his chair. " Like I said, the wind did it. There was a gale, and—and—"

In the silence the elm creaked by the back door, and the increasing fire crackled beneath the black kettle. The girl was down on her haunches before the fire, her dress tight-stretched across her thighs. Flames threw leaping pink shadows on her legs and face.

" Well, Mike, aren't you going to mend it at all? "

" Oh, I don't know, Father. 'Tis so small a thing."

" Small? " gasped the priest with genuine surprise. " A great gaping hole, and you sit there and call it a small thing? "

The old man smiled thinly. He remained silent.

" And the haggart hedge? "

" Haggart hedge, Father? " Mike looked surprised.

" Why, man," the priest said impatiently, " that hedge is growing wild."

Mike was silent.

" And the cottage itself—your home, Nora's, ah, home—it isn't what it used to be, is it? "

" No, I suppose not," Mike said. " But, Father, you know that nothing is what it used to be in Ireland these times."

" Nonsense," said the priest, " sheer nonsense. Why, man, a simple coat of whitewash would work wonders on those walls of yours."

" Yeah, I suppose so," Mike admitted.

" I've never seen such dilapidation," the priest muttered, shaking his head.

Mike was again silent. The priest turned to the girl where she sat on the edge of a sugawn chair staring into the fire.

" Can't you speak to him, Nora? "

She turned. She was about to reply when Mike touched him on the sleeve. " Please, Father, leave Nora out of it, please."

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" All right, as you wish. But you must listen to me—for your own sake. This place is going to rack and ruin, I noticed it the last time I was up here, it struck me between the eyes today."

Mike chewed on the stem of his pipe, eyes downcast.

" Do you heed me, Mike? "

" Yeah, yeah, of course, Father."

" Well then? "

" Yerra, Father," said Mike, smiling feebly, " what do such things matter when all is said and done? "

" Matter? " cried the priest in astonishment. " *Matter?* "

Mike waved a hand towards the window. " These things don't matter very much, Father. This land is dying anyway. I just lets it go its own way."

The priest stared at him in blank amazement. Then he said in a loud, declamatory voice, " Everything matters, Mike. Every single thing under the sun and the moon. The least, most insignificant bit of God's creation—that, ah, that tree out there, the branches on it, the knots in it, the leaves on it in summer—they all matter, Mike, in some way. Birds. Flowers. Stones. Yes, Mike, the very stones on that boreen out there—they matter."

" I know," Mike said.

" Well, what are you talking about then? " cried the priest. " You just said the whole farm doesn't matter."

He was annoyed with himself for getting embroiled in such an argument. He should have known there was no arguing with men like Mike. " What did you say? " he snapped.

" I said, I don't think you understand me, Father." Mike eyed him timidly.

" Look, Mike," he said, " Our Blessed Lord himself put it exactly and beautifully, when He said, ' Consider the lilies of the field . . . they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet—' "

Mike hammered with his fist on the table. " That's it, Father, that's it. Our Lord himself said it."

" Said what? What are you talking about? "

Mike was excited; his blue eyes glowed. " Don't you see, don't you see? The lilies—they don't spin, they toils not, they do nothing, nothing at all, Father, only growing out of the earth. *They* don't bother their heads about things like haysheds and—and hedges and—"

" It's quite impossible to talk to you," the priest said, smiling in spite of himself. " You're a woeful case."

" 'Tis the truth, Father, you don't understand. 'Tis God's own truth."

" I think, Mike, that in this particular case you've, ah, you've misunderstood God."

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Never met the beat of him. Never. Trying to justify his sloth by any means, knowing that I know it's the result of his other sin. Even misinterpreting the Holy Bible to do so. The priest moved his chair aside to allow the girl to lay the table. She stood close to him; he smelled the turf-smell from her dress.

No, I've never seen the beat of him. He's like a spider, spinning webs of words around me, thinking I'll go away and leave him at peace in his sin. Well, he's gone too far this time, that's sure. He's given the game away on himself. The girl stirred by his shoulder, her black hair agleam in the light from the window.

He recalled his last visit. She was still a girl then, sitting demurely at the table as they talked. And they had talked a great deal, to cover their embarrassment, on every blessed thing under the sun, it seemed to him later, except the one thing he had come to talk about.

Many times he had steered the talk towards it, only to come face to face with the pained look in Mike's eyes, and each time he had held his peace. So they talked and talked, with the girl sitting in silence beside them, and after dinner, with the object of his visit not so much as mentioned, he left.

That time the Canon had taken it well enough. He'd got out of it by saying that these things took time; that Rome wasn't built in a day.

" Father Mulcahy," the Canon said aridly, " may I remind you that our object is not to build Rome, but to knock it down."

" That takes time too," he said.

" Seemingly," said the Canon, smiling grimly.

That was that time. He preferred not to think on what would happen if he failed again.

He watched gloomily her slim hands slicing bread. Somewhere down in the valley dogs were barking, and the long lonely hoot of a trawler on the bay came, windborne, over the air.

" Your tea, Father."

She leaned over him with his cup. Odour of turf and other odours that drowned the senses momentarily—he hastily turned the other way in order to cough.

" Ah, thank you, thank you."

Mike was stirring his tea; the cup was a brown whirlpool.

" I was thinking, Father . . ."

" Yes? "

The girl moved into her place on the stool by the wall.

" I was thinking about your father, Jim."

" Oh."

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" 'Twas yourself reminded me of him and you sitting there thinking your thoughts. You looks a great deal like him at times."

" Ah yes, I believe I do."

" He was a fine man, Jim. He was my best friend."

" Yes, Mike, I know."

" I'll never forget the day you were born. He came up here for me, and though I was in the height of my work he dragged me down to the Boston Bar and we didn't come out of it again till next morning, late."

The priest was silent. The girl stared at her plate.

" And then when you were a nipper he was so proud of you. He'd point to you with a smile on his face and say, ' Look at my boy, Mike, he'll be a great footballer one day.' You were a nice little lad, with your white curls, but I could see with half an eye you'd never be a footballer."

The priest stared into his cup as though through the brown liquid he could see his youth in miniature.

" And 'twas the great disappointment to him when it turned out I was right, though, mind you, I never breathed my doubts, for as you know—"

" Stop! " cried the priest with sudden fury. He controlled himself with a great effort of will and, leaning across the table so that the sleeve of his overcoat trailed in the butterplate, said hoarsely, " Mike, you may as well know: I'm here for a reason."

" Reason? " The terrible agonised look was in Mike's eyes again, but this time it was stronger, more naked than ever before. As though he knew that this time nothing would stop the priest uttering the fatal words; as though his world were collapsing around him.

" Yes, a reason. You know I'm your friend—a very old friend—but I'm not talking as a friend now, but as a priest. What I privately think or feel has nothing to do with it. You understand? "

In spite of his resolution, the priest looked pleadingly at Mike, as though begging him through looks alone to understand.

But Mike shook his head and said, " Understand? No, Jim, I don't understand."

The priest swallowed. Across the table, the girl was watching him. He saw her knuckles whiten round the handle of her cup.

" Well, Mike, as you know, there are laws and regulations that we must abide by . . ." He faltered, sucked in his breath sharply, went on, " Yes, Mike, laws . . . that we must, ah, keep to . . . if, ah, if . . . if . . ."

He stopped once more. Their eyes were on his eyes, or on

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his trembling lips, and suddenly he knew that he had hesitated for the last time; could never go on; never pronounce the words, not even if his soul depended on it—and he was not sure that, after all, it might not. "It's about your not going to Mass," he said in a small voice.

The girl's lips pursed into an "Oh"; her fingers relaxed on the cuphandle.

Mike opened his mouth, tried to speak, croaked, then coughed harshly and managed, "I see, Father." His hands were shaking.

"It's a serious business, you know." The priest heard his own voice at a great distance.

"Yeah, yeah, I know that, Father. I know it well. But what you're forgetting is this, Father: I haven't got the mare no more now, and the town is far away for an old man and he bent with rheumatism to walk to —"

"Ah yes," nodded the priest. "Yes, of course. It's funny, the death of the mare had completely slipped my memory. Yes, of course, I'll tell the Canon that. Exceptional circumstances. Very strange, how I forgot the death of the mare."

"Well, Father," said Mike helpfully, "a priest must have a full mind with all his worries."

The priest drained his cup and got hastily to his feet.

"Thank you, Nora," he said, looking down at the girl. "It was an excellent cup of tea, yes, truly an excellent cup of tea, but I must be off now, I really must be on my way now."

The girl was silent. Mike rose.

"Well, ah, good-bye now, Nora."

"Good-bye, Father. Safe road to you." For a second her eyes stared into his, then the long dark lashes came down once more.

As he went out he thought bitterly, Safe road, indeed! This road is anything but safe. Fool, fool! To allow yourself to be melted by an old lecher. As if you didn't know that all these Irish peasants have the gift of the gab, a kind of defensive lyricism that is in their very bones.

In the yard, Mike looked up at the brightening sky over the peak. "'Twill be a nice day after all, I'm thinking, Father."

"No doubt," said the priest dully, eyes on the frozen ground.

"The wind is dropping."

"Good."

"Look." Mike was pointing. "The sea's like glass 'tis so smooth."

The priest looked out over the valley and the green plain. At that distance he could not tell whether the sea was calm or troubled. He wasn't interested anyway.

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"And them gulls sporting over it." Mike was staring still towards the sea.

He looked, he screwed up his eyes. But he could see only the empty grey air. He glanced at the old man. His blue eyes were shining. At it again, he thought. Can't stop, even when the need for it has passed. And yet, and yet... Could it be that...?

He shook the half-formed thought from his mind, and said casually, "Tell me, Mike, what do you do with yourself all day?"

Mike grinned. "I sits, Father."

"All day?"

"Yeah, all day."

"But don't you never get tired of it?"

"Never, Father."

"And—and tell me: when you're sitting, what do you think?"

"Nothing, Father."

"But, man alive, you must think of something!"

"No, Father. I just sits there and sees."

"You mean you look through the window?"

"Oh no, Father. I sees with the eye of my mind, kind of."

"And tell me: what do you see?"

"But I told you, Father. I sees the sea and the valley and the fields, and I sees the mountain-peak. But, of course, when I'm sitting I sees 'em without seeing 'em, kind of, if you get my meaning."

The priest nodded hastily. "I get you all right, Mike," he said. Then he held out his hand, said, "Good luck," and, turning on his heel, strode across the yard and went down the frozen boreen with long mad strides.

The wind had dropped. Westwards, the sea lay calm under the brightening sunlight. And at his window old Mike sat, his pipe clenched between his teeth, while the girl cleared the breakfast ware from the table.

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A SET FOR EVERY SHEEP

"A fine campaign, sir,"
said Wedge, awed and moved

BY JOAN AIKEN

YOU will be wanting an explanation for the business of the sheep, and here it is.

If ever you saw a little man like a secretary-bird, with large ears and a wisp of distraught grey hair and pale myopic eyes like grapes behind hornrimmed glasses, sitting in the tube with a thermometer in his mouth, it was probably Lord Dunsinane.

A fortune-teller had foretold that he would meet his downfall either in a pub or in a taxi, and Lord Dunsinane was taking no chances. He was a teetotaller and travelled by tube. He took his temperature every hour and wore shock-proof socks and a lightning-conductor pinned to his hearing-aid. Perhaps it was not unfitting that so timid a man should be remembered in connection with sheep.

When he got out of the tube he toddled down Fleet Street a little way until he came to an enormous new white building. Here the doormen bowed, and the telephonists curtseyed, and Wedge, the editor, locked himself in the cloakroom, for these were the new premises of the *Sunday Spell*, a newspaper devoted almost entirely to prediction, and Lord Dunsinane was the proprietor.

But before he entered the doors he always spared a scowl for the little pub occupying part of the ground premises. It was called The Medusa's Head, and it was old and wizened and black-beamed, and its sooty irregular little shape was wrapped round and contained by the mighty new building as a dirty little bit of grit is embedded in the fibres of a beautiful tree. It was the mote in Lord Dunsinane's eye and the thorn in his side. He would dearly have liked to pull it down; unfortunately the proprietress held it on a 999 years' lease of which there was still a few months to run.

But when that day came, let her beware! for Lord Dunsinane intended to operate personally the crane which would dash a

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ten-ton weight clean through the front wall of The Medusa's Head and reduce it to rubble.

Meanwhile the proprietress, pretty Mrs. Owen, was not idle. She had written to the Ministry of Works asking them to include the building in their list of ancient monuments scheduled for preservation, claiming that the pub, which had belonged to her family for fifty generations, was of quite as much historical importance as Westminster Abbey. Moreover if it had not been lost somewhere during the ninth century, the pub would still have had as its sign the original Gorgon's Head, brought from Greece to England by a Phoenician gentleman-adventurer.

The London Museum, called in to arbitrate, was sceptical here, reasoning that a sign guaranteed to turn customers to stone was not the best means of attracting them, and that the pub, once a riverside one, had originally been called The Mud-User's Hod. But Mrs. Owen countered that the Gorgon's Head had become worn with use and only worked on drunken or credulous customers. The Museum therefore conceded that if she would produce the head, they would fight her case.

So matters stood.

Lord Dunsinane entered his office and summoned his editor.

"Wedge," he said, "I've had another letter from this mad Welshman. Will you deal with it, please? Something about sheep. And you can arrange for a suite of rooms to be cleared—I shall take up residence in the Spell Building for the duration of the Lift Strike."

Look you, Sir, the letter said in passionate and almost illegible writing, *unfair it is that sheep in Newport Isle of Wight should have better treatment than those in Newport Mon. No dentists for sheep are there in Cardiff nor Llanelly nor anywhere in the length and breadth of Wales whatever! Unjust it is on our sheep.*

There was no address or signature on the letter which was crumpled and rather grubby, as if it had been written with the paper resting on a muddy knee.

"If only he'd given his name," said Wedge thoughtfully. "I have a feeling in my bones that there might be the germ of a good campaign here."

"Pish," said Lord Dunsinane. "We don't want campaigns. Horoscopes and predictions are what sell this paper, I'll have you remember."

But Wedge went away muttering, "Teeth for Foreign Visitors —What About Our Own Sheep?" He did not always see eye to eye with his proprietor . . .

Cronnet, Lord Dunsinane's butler, had moved into the Spell

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building with his master. About a week after the beginning of the Lift Strike—which was due to a prediction in the *Sunday Spell* foretelling a major lift disaster within twenty-three months—Cronnet was startled by a frenzied yell from Lord Dunsinane's room as he was about to take in an early cup of tea.

He found his master sitting bolt upright in bed, staring haggardly about him.

"What is it, sir?"

"I had a dream, Cronnet—a ghastly, terrible dream! My heart has almost stopped beating!"

"Dear me," said Cronnet, scratching his head. "What would the dream have been about, then, sir?"

"That's what I can't remember! All I know is that it was the worst thing that could possibly happen!"

"Well, if you don't remember, I don't see how it can be so bad," said Cronnet, rather crossly, for he wanted to get back to his own tea and sporting predictions. "Here, have a nice hot cuppa, sir, and look at these pulls . . ."

Cronnet had no sooner got settled, however, than Lord Dunsinane let out another yell.

"What is it now, then?" grumbled Cronnet, pottering back like an old nanny.

"Look what my horoscope says, Cronnet—'All your dreams will come true!' Supposing *that* dream came true?"

"Then you'd know what it was about, wouldn't you?" pointed out Cronnet reasonably . . .

Next morning Cronnet found Lord Dunsinane in the same state of agitation.

"Dreaming again, sir?" he said resignedly.

"Yes, Cronnet, yes! The same terrible dream!"

"Did you remember it this time, sir?"

"No, but it was just as bad. I have the same feeling here—" Lord Dunsinane thumped his chest—"as if I had a stone-cold marble cannonball under my ribs! Oh, this is unendurable. Phone Wedge to come in. I must ask his advice."

Wedge promised to come right away. Lord Dunsinane also called his daughter Janet. She arrived simultaneously with Wedge, and the pair of young people gazed at one another sadly while Lord Dunsinane poured out his troubles.

"Father, you worry too much about dreams and predictions," said Janet. "You should get out more—into the sunshine, into the country—"

"Not likely!" shuddered her father. "Why, only last year one of my horoscopes warned me against snakes, and another said Beware of Falling Stones. Nothing would persuade me to

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go into the country. What I want is something to prevent me from dreaming—or to explain the dreams in a reassuring way."

"A drop of whisky last thing gives a wonderful peaceful sleep," said Wedge.

"Or malted milk," suggested Janet.

"Sleeping pills?"

"Pillow stuffed with sweet feverfew?"

"Soothing subliminal music?"

But as Lord Dunsinane peevishly rejected all these suggestions, Wedge at length said, "You say, sir, that you have this dream just before waking?"

"That's what's so horrible," muttered Lord Dunsinane. "I wake all of a sweat and a tremble, without knowing why."

"Then all you need do is ask Cronnet to call you five minutes earlier, *before* you have had the dream."

The other two were struck with the brilliance of this suggestion and Lord Dunsinane, delighted, exclaimed, "Ah, it was a stroke of genius on my part to pick you for editor. I am a past master at choosing intelligent staff. Your salary's doubled from today."

"I'd rather marry Janet," said Wedge quickly.

"Impossible," Lord Dunsinane snapped. "Janet shall never marry while I live! You know perfectly well that my 1955 horoscope said on my daughter's wedding day my monument would be erected in Fleet Street."

Janet's eyes filled with huge tears and she ran from the room. Wedge, hoping at least that Lord Dunsinane's mood was favourable enough to approve one or two campaigns, hastily submitted a batch of suggestions: "Make way for the Cyclists," "Make Sunday Granny's Day," and his own favourite, "Australians! Come back to the Mother Country!"

But Lord Dunsinane would have none of them.

"Sir!" said Wedge desperately. "You must know that you are paralysing the economic life of this country with all the predictions you publish in the *Spell*. People take them so seriously that no docker will work on a Monday, no trains run on days when the signs of the zodiac are at the cusp (whatever that means), cabinet ministers are chosen for their birth hours, not their abilities—"

But Lord Dunsinane was not listening. He was gazing at the tealeaves in his cup.

"Teeth," Lord Dunsinane was muttering. "Quite plainly these tealeaves denote a set of teeth. I must see a dentist. Oh, and by the way, Wedge, there's another letter from the mad Welshman. Take it, will you?"

This time the Welshman had written: *Indeed to goodness if*

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only I could find a right-thinking paper to support the cause of a poor honest sheep-farmer there's happy I would be ! For here's my poor Blodwen with not a tooth to bite the green grass. Porridge for breakfast every morning I have to make her, gruel for dinner, mash for her tea. Crying shame it is, and the National Health should take the matter on before I will be knocking at the door of Number Ten, demanding fair play for Welsh sheep!

As before, no signature.

" Fair play for sheep," said Wedge wistfully. " A Health Act with teeth in it. Really, sir, it might be a great campaign."

" Pish," said Lord Dunsinane.

For a week Cronnet woke Lord Dunsinane at ten to eight and the dream did not recur. But on the eighth day as Cronnet poured the tea he heard the same terrible yell, and found Lord Dunsinane tottering along the passage in his striped pyjamas with a glazed look in his eye.

" It's come back, Cronnet! My subconscious must have become used to the earlier hour of waking! " Lord Dunsinane distractedly sniffed his tea and drank some spirits of ammonia. Then he said, " Cronnet! From now on you must call me at half past seven."

" Yes, sir," said Cronnet resignedly.

But this earned Lord Dunsinane only a brief respite. Soon Cronnet had to wake him at seven, then at six, then at five, in order to forestall the dream. The staff of the *Sunday Spell* had to adjust their working hours accordingly. The time came when Lord Dunsinane had lost an entire twenty-four hours' sleep, and while everyone else was still in the last day of May he had moved on to the first of June.

" Where is this going to end? " lamented Wedge, when he met Janet for a snatched lunch at 10 a.m. one day. " Your father is becoming a neurotic wreck—and so are the rest of us. Something terrible will happen soon. Last Sunday *Spell*'s horoscope advised all Virgo subjects to abstain from both protein and carbohydrate for the forthcoming year. What will become of them? "

At this moment they were startled by a solitary "Ba-aa! " They saw an elderly man coming from the direction of Lincoln's Inn Fields. He wore a shepherd's smock, and trousers tied up at the knee with string. He carried a crook and was accompanied by an equally elderly sheep.

He said to Wedge, " Will your honour tell me if I am on the right road for the *Sunday Spell*? "

Wedge said alertly, " Can you tell me your business? "

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"Me and my poor Blodwen have walked all the way from Wales in search of fair play for sheep, see. Letter after letter have I written, and no reply, there is uncivil! Coming myself I am now to see justice done."

"What is your trouble, then, Mr.—?"

"Rhys, sir, Dai Rhys is my name and I'm from Llan Ron which anybody will tell is the loveliest farm in all North Wales. Please to tell me, sir, which is the *Sunday Spell*?"

"We are there now," said Wedge, and led Mr. Rhys up the stairs of the Spell building, where no one was particularly surprised to see a sheep, since rams, goats, lions, and other signs of the zodiac were a commonplace, live or otherwise. Blodwen nipped neatly up ahead of them, for she was a mountain sheep and accustomed to leaping from crag to crag.

Lord Dunsinane was quite pleased to be distracted from thoughts of his dream.

"This is Mr. Rhys, sir," Wedge said. "He wants his cause supported."

"What cause would that be?" inquired Lord Dunsinane.

Mr. Rhys handed him a grubby newspaper cutting. "Only read that then, sir!"

The cutting, which was from *The Guardian*, was headed, SHEEP FITTED WITH FALSE TEETH, and reported how an Isle of Wight ewe had put on twenty pounds in a week after having been fitted with a set of dentures.

"Every dentist in Wales have I been to!" said Mr. Rhys sadly. "And not a man of them has ever made a set of dentures for a sheep."

"Really this is most thought-provoking," said Lord Dunsinane, when he had carefully read the cutting. "For I distinctly saw a set of dentures in the tealeaves only last month."

"Tealeaves!" said Mr. Rhys with fearful scorn. "There is a superstitious old pack of mumbo-jumbo, not fit for a man of sense to put credit in."

Wedge and Janet held their breath with fright, but Mr. Rhys went on, "Now I, with my back to the Dreaming Stone and the winds of heaven about my ears, and the majesty of Gwyn Wrtyn mountain under my feet, have dreamed of dentures these seventy nights past."

"Really?" said Lord Dunsinane, all ears, ignoring the slighting reference to tealeaves. "Are you an expert on dreams, Mr. Rhys?"

"Dreams, is it?" said Mr. Rhys. "Ask if I do not interpret dreams from Llanfair to Pontypridd? And foretell from them too! More weddings and funerals have I foreseen than there are

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in the book of Numbers. Rhys the Future, they call me."

"But this is splendid!" cried Lord Dunsinane in high delight. "I will strike a bargain with you, Mr. Rhys. Am I right in thinking that you want a set of dentures for Blodwen and the rest of your flock?"

"Fair play," said Mr. Rhys. "I am only wanting teeth for the older sheep. And not charity, mind! Let the Health Service pay for it, say I! Many's the ewe would be more use to her country than some old wives I could name, munching their toast on Government teeth."

"I will ask my dentist to fit Blodwen with uppers and lowers," said Lord Dunsinane. "I invite you both to stay here as my guests for a week until we see if she really does put on weight when she can chew. And if this is proved, I will support your cause in my paper, Mr. Rhys—if you, in the meantime, will help me with a personal dream problem."

"Indeed," said Mr. Rhys, "there is glad I will be to help you. What is the nature of this dream that troubles you?"

"That is what I can't remember."

"Difficult it is, in that case," said Mr. Rhys. "Interpret your dream without hearing its nature is hard indeed, unless I will be having my Dreaming Stone at the back of me so that I can dream right through my dream into your own."

"Dreaming Stone?" said Lord Dunsinane, with an acquisitive gleam in his eye. "What exactly is that? Is it heavy?"

"Matter of a couple of tons," said Mr. Rhys.

"No trouble to shift," said Lord Dunsinane. "If you will give directions, I will have the stone brought to London—and taken back to Wales, of course, when you return," he added reluctantly, as a wild light of protest came into Mr. Rhys' eye.

So next day Blodwen, sleeping like a baby under gas, was fitted with the finest set of porcelain grinders that ever sheep gnashed, and put out to graze in Lincoln's Inn Fields, where she soon became as fat as butter.

It was found impossible to fetch the Dreaming Stone for a few days because of an awkward planetary mixture of Cancer and Gemini, but in the end a British Railways lorry dropped it outside The Medusa's Head and it was manhandled into the front hall of the Sunday Spell building.

Here a difficulty was encountered: no lift to take it up.

"You couldn't do your divining in the vestibule, Mr. Rhys?" said Lord Dunsinane.

"Even the prophet Isaiah could not predict anything by there, sir! Too much noise, look you."

Lord Dunsinane persuaded Cronnet to run the lift, in flat

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defiance of union rules which said that no unauthorised persons, etc., etc.

Mr. Rhys accompanied the stone on its upward journey, in a trance of mystical reunion. All went well until they reached the ninth floor and stepped out; then the weight of the Dreaming Stone suddenly became too much for the lift cables, and the whole thing fell with a fearful and cataclysmic crash down and down, through the teleprinters' floor and the photographic studios and the saloon bar of The Medusa's Head (luckily it was just before opening hours) and the mailing department into the very bowels of the basement, and buried itself fathoms deep in London clay.

"There is a misfortune," said Rhys the Future, very gloomily.

"It can easily be hoisted out," Lord Dunsinane assured him. He added hopefully, "I suppose you didn't—well—*get* anything from the stone on the way up? About my dream?"

"I was only having a first, dim flicker," said Rhys. "Time it takes, look you. But this one thing I can tell you— your dream is being put on to you by some person close to you. It is no accident, that dream."

"*Put on to me?* How disgraceful! Who could do such a thing? Could it be my daughter Janet?"

"That I am not knowing," said Mr. Rhys, and he was so dispirited by the loss of his stone that, clean contrary to his usual rule of abstemiousness, he went down to The Medusa's Head for a rum and milk, while Lord Dunsinane rang for a team of excavators to hoist the stone out of the deep hole it had dug.

"Nice old inn-sign you have there," said Mr. Rhys to pretty Mrs. Owen. "Puts me in mind of my Blod, with the wool curling round her homely face." He could see at once that Mrs. Owen was a kindred spirit.

"Ah, but it's nothing to the one there should be," said Mrs. Owen. Custom was slack—most customers were out watching the cranes delving in the deep pit for the buried Dreaming Stone —so she told Mr. Rhys all about her troubles with Lord Dunsinane and the lease, and how the discovery of the real Medusa's Head would save her from eviction. "But hunt high and hunt low we do, and never a hair of a head have we found."

An expression of illumination came over Mr. Rhys' face. "It will be you, now, that will have been putting these dreams on Lord Dunsinane?" he asked delicately.

Mrs. Owen blushed. "There's shamed I am," she said. "But I couldn't help it, indeed, so worried I've been. And today's the last day of my lease!"

At this simultaneous moment Lord Dunsinane, too, realised

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Joan Aiken lives in an ex-pub in Sussex (she has had to sign an undertaking not to sell beer in it and recently had an application from a touring club asking if she would put up forty members). She has two children, a black cat, and, on account of all the wooden panelling in the house, a number of wood-boring beetles who almost count as members of the family. Daily routine consists of trying to drown the tapping by typing and trying to drown the beetles with insecticide, ad lib . . . She has written countless short stories and four children's books. The fourth, The Wolves of Willoughby Chase, comes out in October.

that in his preoccupation with sheep and dreams, he had let the 366th day of the 999th year of Mrs. Owen's lease creep up on him. A happy gleam came into his eye. He looked out of his window at the cranes in Fleet Street struggling to get a purchase on the massive Dreaming Stone.

" When they have that stone hoisted," he said, " I shall use it to deal the first blow at that squalid little pub which defaces the frontage of my beautiful building. I shall go down now and tell Mrs. Owen."

Wedge looked unhappy. He was fond of The Medusa's Head.

" Is it wise? " he suggested hastily. " What about the prediction that you would—would meet with some mischance in a pub? "

" Aha! " exclaimed Lord Dunsinane, " but if the lease has expired it is no longer a pub, is it? "

And he went down without more ado. Wedge went too, to have a last beer and gaze sadly at the notice, left from Ancient British times, which said, ONE FOR THE WOAD? NOT IF YOU'RE THE CHARIOTEER!

Such commotion was in progress as they entered the bar. Mrs. Owen was laughing and crying and kissing her customers and pressing tankards of mead (also left from Ancient British times) on all and sundry.

" Mrs. Owen," said Lord Dunsinane with dignity, " I have come to inform you— "

But she turned to him crying, " It's found, Lord Dunsinane, it was in that deep hole! I've rung the Ministry and the Museum and there's a man coming round. Look— " and she held up a most extraordinary object which, under its coat of London clay, could just be recognised as a face with a decidedly severe expression, surrounded by some comatose snakes, the whole thing set in a round yellow tin tray—the sort that often has a brewer's name painted on it.

" Pish— " began Lord Dunsinane, but as he spoke a change

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came over him—he became even more rigidly dignified, his face turned marble-grey.

"Ah!" exclaimed Rhys the Future in triumph. "Now I have it, your dream! To be turned to stone by the Medusa!"

Lord Dunsinane was an honourable man according to his lights. In acknowledgment of Rhys' exposition, late though it came, he breathed out his final command. Wedge, entering the public bar, was just in time to catch it.

"New campaign—*Sunday Spell*—a set for every sheep!"

"It will be a fine campaign, sir," said Wedge, awed and moved. "It will be a credit to the paper and your memory."

He spoke to unheeding ears; Lord Dunsinane had retired into his marble. No one could think quite what to do with him, so he was put on a plinth in Fleet Street, alongside the press lords, on the day Wedge and Janet were married.

Mr. Rhys, too, stayed in Fleet Street, rather than be put to the expense of transporting his Dreaming Stone back to Wales. He married pretty Mrs. Owen, and Blodwen grazed for the rest of her life in Lincoln's Inn Fields.

Meanwhile the campaign to provide a set for every sheep gathered momentum and overcame all obstacles. And this is the reason why in the year 1963 (due to a slight error of phrasing in the Act and a misunderstanding at Ministerial level) each sheep in the United Kingdom was supplied with a television set of its very own.

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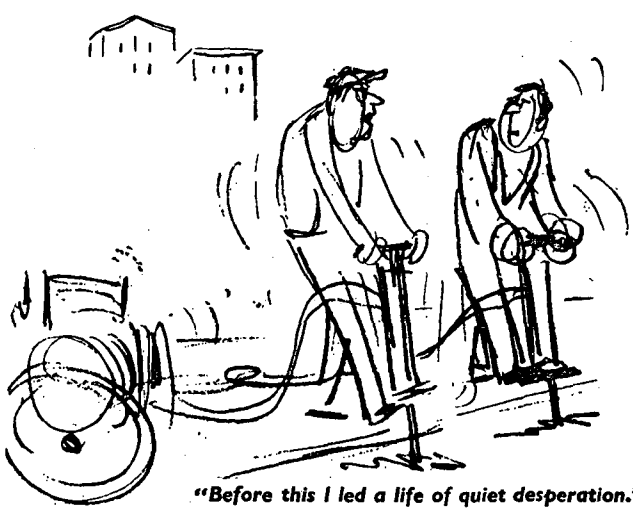

"Before this I led a life of quiet desperation."

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CHIP ON BLACK 13

She was brushing the last crumbs of money from her fingers

BY HENRY SLESAR

A DELIRIOUS patient draws little attention in a hospital, and the woman, wandering among the gaming tables of the Boomtown Club in Las Vegas, was well camouflaged among patrons only slightly less flushed of cheek and heated of eye. She placed a single chip on Black 13 on three different tables as she made her way across the room, as if brushing the last crumbs of her money from her fingers.

She was a young woman, in a satiny silver suit, and someone had expended a great deal of time on her hair and make-up. The good work was undone. During the course of play, she had tugged at the careful curls and made them limp. Her powder was streaked, and her eye make-up discoloured by either perspiration or tears. Yet, to the wary eye of Spiegel, one of the club's stalwarts, she was on her way to the powder-room for something more than cosmetic repair.

He was half a room ahead of her when he went to the door and rapped lightly.

It opened, and the stout matron in her starched white uniform looked at him wide-eyed.

He spoke to her briefly; she nodded. He moved away, just in time for the woman to enter, the knuckles of her hand white on the clasp of her handbag. He remained within calling distance, just in case.

Five minutes later, the door opened again and the matron, paled by some intervening experience, nodded towards him.

"You were right," she whispered. "I watched her in the mirror and saw her take out this little bottle from her bag. She was about to drink it when I grabbed it from her hand and threw the stuff down the john. She's kind of shook up, but she'll be O.K."

"I'll handle it from here," Spiegel said. "You call Doc and tell him what happened. Send her out."

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A moment later, the matron reappeared, her thick fingers holding lightly to the elbow of the woman, who looked bewildered and tear-stained. "Please," she mumbled. "I didn't do anything wrong. Please let me go . . ."

"It's all right," Spiegel said gently. "Nothing to worry about now. Would you mind coming with me?"

"My—my husband is meeting me here. I have to wait for him—"

"You won't be long." He took her other elbow. "Better come with me, Mrs.—"

She didn't give her name.

The entire action had taken only a few minutes, and had roused none of the customers from their dedicated play. Spiegel might have been a lifelong friend of the young woman's; he smiled and chatted as he walked her through the crowd to the discreet door in the corner of the club.

The man in the office wasn't startled by the interruption; he seemed to expect it, or others like it. He wore a neat grey business suit, and had the face and manner of a prosperous shopkeeper.

Spiegel said, "This lady had a little bad luck tonight, Doctor, and she's not feeling very well."

The woman opened her mouth to say something to him, then decided to address the man behind the desk. "Are you really a doctor?" she said.

"The title is a sort of joke with my employees," he said pleasantly. "But if you'd done anything foolish, miss, I would have to call a real one, and that's a nuisance."

She jumped at a sudden sound, but it was only Spiegel leaving the room. She looked at the doctor and said, "You have no right to bring me here. I haven't done anything."

"Please." He held up a soft hand. "I just like to talk to my patrons sometimes. You're married?"

"Yes. My husband is meeting me in front of the club at twelve. I really must go—"

"Would you mind telling me your name?"

"I'm Verna Bailey."

He folded his hands. "Mrs. Bailey, I don't like to see people as unhappy as you."

"Then you shouldn't be in this business!"

He nodded, as if he agreed. Then he opened a drawer and looked into its depths, without lifting his eyes when he spoke again.

"How much did you lose? Five hundred? A thousand?"

"It's none of your business."

He clucked. "I'm trying to help you. Was it more than that?

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"What did you do, spend all your savings?"

She had to turn away from him and find a handkerchief.

He sighed, and withdrew a fresh stack of ten-dollar bills from the drawer. Carefully, he counted out a pile, then snapped a rubber band round it. He picked it up, pushed back his chair, and came up behind her.

"Do me a favour," he said softly. "Stay away from the tables, mine or anybody else's. And stay away from those little bottles of stuff. You understand me?"

"But I can't!"

"You can," he said firmly. "Here. It's five hundred dollars. Not a stake, Mrs. Bailey, it's severance pay. You're fired from being a gambler, understand? You can't play here or anywhere else. You're not welcome any more."

She turned and looked at him. Then she took the money.

When Harold's green saloon car pulled up in front of the club, Verna climbed into the seat beside him and tried not to meet his eyes.

"So this is how you keep your promise," he said, not harshly. "This was supposed to be a rest cure—"

"I'm sorry, Harold."

"Well, I hope you got it out of your system. I suppose you lost all the money I gave you?"

"Yes," she said meekly.

He groaned.

"Thirty bucks shot to hell!" Then he was apologetic. "I'm sorry, Verna. It's not the money I was thinking about, it's your nerves."

"Oh, I feel fine," she said. "And you know something, Harold? I don't think I even *need* my nerve medicine tonight." She smiled, and patted her bag lovingly.

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RÉSUMÉ

Razors pain you;
Rivers are damp;
Acids stain you;
And drugs cause cramp.
Guns aren't lawful;
Nooses give;
Gas smells awful;
You might as well live.

DOROTHY PARKER

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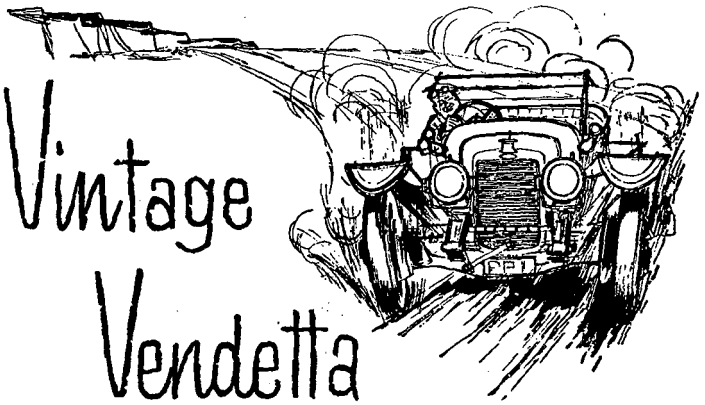

Vintage Vendetta

BY VICTOR CANNING

THE auctioneer let the buzz of excitement around the room subside. Then, in a fat, satisfied voice, he said, "One thousand pounds I am offered. One thousand pounds, ladies and gentlemen. Any advance on one thousand pounds?"

He looked across in the direction of Professor Patrick Walter Fitzharris, M.Sc., F.I.M., F.R.Ae.S., now retired, but at one time Professor of Industrial Metallurgy at Midland University, member of the Council of United Kingdom Metals Association, and author of *Principles of Foundry Metallurgy*, which, while not as exciting as *Gone with the Wind*, in the last twenty years had sold almost as many copies throughout the world. The Professor glared back at the auctioneer, all his Irish blood stirred up.

The Professor was a short, wiry, jockey-sized man of about sixty, greyhaired, and with bright blue eyes now sparkling with frustration. At his side sat Lydia Annette Fitzharris, his daughter, blonde, with softer blue eyes than her father, a willowy figure in tweeds, the air about her faintly touched with the fragrance of Miss Dior. She put a hand on his arm and said, "Control yourself, Daddy—you can't afford it."

"Control myself, is it," growled the Professor, his anger emphasising his native brogue. "I want it and I'm going to have it. What would a man be if he only bought the things he could afford?"

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" Solvent," said Lydia crisply.

" Then it's no way to live," said the Professor.

" One thousand pounds—for the first time," began the auctioneer. " One thousand pounds—for the second time—"

" Guineas! " barked the Professor.

Lydia raised her eyes to heaven and gave up.

" Thank you, Professor," said the auctioneer, smiling, and then announced to the company, " One thousand guineas I am offered. One thousand guineas . . . " He went off into his patter and his head was now turned to a distant part of the sale-room.

While he did so, the Professor said in a fierce whisper to Lydia, " Who's bidding against me? Thought this would be a snip."

" I don't know," said Lydia. " But if you're not careful you'll be pushed right over your limit."

" By Saint Patrick and the Holy Spectrum," snorted the Professor, " there's no limit to a thing like this! "

Lydia smiled to herself at her father's passion.

" Some day," she said, " you must tell me what the Holy Spectrum is."

" One thousand five hundred," said a voice from the far back of the crowd. Swiftly though he screwed his head round to try and catch a glimpse of the other bidder, the Professor could not pick him out. Only Lydia at his side frowned sharply as she thought she now recognised the voice.

" Somebody else must have discovered it, too," groaned the Professor, then with a belligerent look at the auctioneer, he called, " Guineas! "

And the object of the rising emotion and frustration in the Professor's breast? Well, unless you happen to share his particular type of passion, you have little hope of understanding fully.

The Professor was a lover of old motor cars. He was a member of the Veteran Car Club and the Vintage Sports-Car Club. He already owned a 1906 Wolseley-Siddeley tourer, and still used a 1927 Alfa-Romeo 22/90 to drive himself about in. There is a distinction, of course, between Veteran, Edwardian, and Vintage in the motor-car world. Veteran cars must have been manufactured not later than 1904, then follows the Edwardian period from 1905 to 1916, and the Vintage cars run from 1919 to 1930.

The thing which the Professor thought that he alone had spotted in the list of contents for sale at the auction of an old country-house was a motor car. Under the heading *Miscellaneous* —immediately after *Outside Equipment and Garden Tools and*

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Furniture—it had been catalogued simply as *Sunbeam car, good running order.*

But when the Professor had come to view it before the sale he had realised with considerable excitement that this was the understatement of the year. The car was in fact a 1913 Sunbeam 12/16, a tourer, which to any lover of old motor cars was like an art dealer coming across an unknown Utrillo in an outhouse.

The auctioneer caught the Professor's eye as a voice from the back of the room said, "One thousand eight hundred pounds."

"Guineas!" the Professor fired back.

The auctioneer smiled happily. But there was no happiness in the Professor. To his increasing annoyance and frustration the unknown bidder matched him all the way up to two thousand pounds. When the bidding reached that point even the Professor sadly recognised his limit, and the car was knocked down to the other man for two thousand guineas.

The Professor, fuming with disappointment and anger, stumped out of the room, got into his vintage Alfa-Romeo, and drove off, quite forgetting that his daughter, Lydia, had accompanied him to the sale.

Lydia did not mind this, however. She was used to her father's moods. She went out of the house, threading through the auction crowd, to the garage at the bottom of the drive. A young man was leaning against the door, eating a sandwich, a vacuum flask in one hand. He turned as she came up and grinned at her. He was a tallish young man of about twenty-five, blue-eyed, fairhaired, and his brown face was marked with a suspicion of freckles. His name was Richard Denby and he had met Lydia once before.

"Hi, there," he said pleasantly. "Cold day. Like a cup of coffee?" Before Lydia could reply, he had filled a cup for her. He handed it to her with a little bow.

Lydia said, "We've met before, haven't we?"

"Lord," said Richard, "did I make such little impression? Yes, at the Hunt Ball two weeks ago. We had three dances together, and you only drank lemonade. As a matter of fact, I fell hopelessly in love with you. I still am, madly. Would you mind if I asked you to marry me?"

Lydia frowned. He was an attractive young man, and she remembered him well, but at the moment love and marriage were far from her mind.

"Why were you bidding for the Sunbeam?" she asked.

"This baby?" He nodded into the garage where the old car sat, its brass- and bodywork sadly in need of polish. "Beauty, isn't she? Bit of work on her and you won't recognise her.

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Actually I wasn't bidding for her. Can't afford that kind of money. If I could, I'd be putting it into my business."

"Business?"

"You remember—I told you about it at the dance. I've just started a garage in Rivervale. Mean to have a string of them all over the country in the next ten years. No, in this, I was a kind of agent."

"Bidding for someone else?"

"Yes."

"Who?"

"Is it etiquette to say?"

"To hell with etiquette," said Lydia sharply. She could produce something of her father's directness when necessary.

"Just as you like," said Richard. "I'd break any rule for you. It was for Sir John Coddinstone. Told me to go up to three thousand if necessary."

"Sir John Coddinstone!" Lydia's eyes widened.

"Why'd you say it like that?"

A wry smile played about Lydia's lovely lips. "That's nothing to the way my father would say it if he knew. He and Sir John would cheerfully murder one another to get possession of, say, a Mercedes-Simplex."

"They're scarce."

"I know. There isn't much I don't know about cars."

"Excellent. You know, I've a theory that women should become car salesmen, I mean, saleswomen. After all, who decides on the family car, really? Why, the woman. You can have a job in my place, if you like—"

"You don't waste any time, do you? Which do I get first, the job or marriage?" Lydia smiled. "Anyway, you'd have to ask my father about marriage and when he knows about this—"

"You'll tell him?"

"Why not? You don't want things made easy for you, do you?"

"For you—no obstacle counts. Would you like a sandwich to go with that coffee?"

"No, thanks." Lydia put the cup down and walked away, but as she went she was smiling to herself. Of course, a girl would prefer to be wooed more romantically, but there was something refreshing about Richard Denby's directness, and she liked the way his fair hair strayed a little untidily over his forehead.

Actually Lydia did not have to tell her father about the way Sir John had outbid him at the auction. Sir John Coddinstone, C.B.E., J.P., head of Coddinstone Steel Products and a handful

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of other companies, now semi-retired, told the Professor himself. He arrived at the Professor's house, which was a few miles outside Rivervale, that evening at half past six in time to be given, reluctantly, a whisky and soda.

Between the Professor and Sir John there had existed, since the time they both went to the same public school together, a curious love-hate relationship. They were both quick-tempered men with wills of their own. At school they had competed fiercely for the last place in the cricket and rugby teams and for election to various exclusive societies. As young men they had fallen in love with the same girls and in retirement they had by chance settled in the same part of the country. The Professor, whose metallurgical researches had contributed to Sir John's business successes, had the pure scientist's indifference to wealth. He just regretted that his chosen field of research had brought him so much in contact with Sir John.

Life had never missed a chance to keep the feud going between them. It was typical of life that it had made them both keen Veteran car enthusiasts. Sir John owned and still used a 1928 Alvis 12/50, front-wheel drive, and could not have been more scathing of the merits of the Professor's Alfa-Romeo.

"Well, Fitzy!" bellowed Sir John, "I see you've done it again. Blast you!" Sir John was a large, jovial-faced, fleshy man, the same age as the Professor, and he habitually addressed everyone as though half a gale were blowing. His voice now made the glasses on the sideboard ring and the Professor wince.

"Done what? And don't shout at me. I'm not deaf, even if you are."

"I'm not deaf! And you know what I mean. I've just had a letter from the Secretary of Knight's saying I've been blackballed again. That's the fifth time."

Knight's Club, of which the Professor was not only a member, but also Chairman of the House Committee, was an exclusive London club, where one could eat well and in comfort, where the port was excellent, and the stakes at cards as high as one cared to make them. It had long been Sir John's ambition to become a member.

The Professor shrugged his shoulders. "Somebody there doesn't like you. Plain. Why keep on trying?"

"Somebody!" Sir John took a turn up the room, paused at the sideboard and helped himself to another whisky and soda. "It's you, Fitzy! Every time my name comes up you slip in the one black ball that counts against me. Damn rotten show. After all, you've got nothing against me really. I mean, not from a club point of view."

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"No?" The Professor lit his pipe unhurriedly. Then he went on, "A club, Coddy, is a place where a man goes to relax, to be with friends, to enjoy himself. He doesn't want to meet people there he doesn't want to meet. Whole idea of a club. Now take you—ever since you turned up at school with me, I've been runnin' into you all over the place. Turn a damned corner, no matter where, and there you are. But not at Knight's. I can't tell you what a joy it is, Coddy, to be certain that every time I go through the door of Knight's I know that you can't follow."

"Dashed unfriendly. Just because I squeezed you out of the rugger team, and then that young girl—"

"Old history, Coddy. Go away, there's a good chap."

"I will. But I'll tell you something—I got the Secretary's letter this morning. If I'd been elected, I was going to let you alone to bid for that 1913 Sunbeam—just out of gratitude. But not when I learnt you'd done it again. Yes—don't look so pop-eyed, Fitzy—it was me bidding against you, through a young feller called Denby who's just started a garage in Rivervale. Any time you care to withdraw your objection to me bein' a member of Knight's, Fitzy—then you can have the Sunbeam for two thousand pounds."

"Bribery—by all that's holy!" The Professor was on his feet.

"Prejudice!" Sir John smacked his empty whisky glass down.

As they glared at each other, Lydia came into the room.

"What are you two shouting about?" she asked.

"Shouting?" Sir John looked amazed. "Just thanking your father for the drink, my dear. Must be on my way, eh? Good night, all."

When Sir John had gone, the Professor poured himself a stiff drink, muttering to himself as he did so.

Lydia said, "There's a young man to see you."

"Send him away."

"I can't. He wants to ask you for permission to marry me."

The Professor spun round. "Marriage! Is this, the day of my greatest tribulation, the time to be introducing such a subject? It's more like murder, I feel!"

Lydia smiled. Before her father could say more she went to the door and opened it.

"Come in," she called.

Richard Denby entered the room.

"Daddy," said Lydia softly, her eyes on Richard, "this is Mr. Richard Denby, who wants—"

"What name?" the Professor roared.

The door closed as Lydia retired. Richard, wincing a little at the roar, stood his ground by the door.

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"Denby, sir."

"Denby—the garage bloke?"

"Yes, sir."

Perhaps it would be as well to draw a veil over the rest of the very short and mostly one-sided conversation. A few minutes later, as Richard left the house, Lydia appeared from the bushes at the drive side and, chuckling, said, "Don't talk now." She slid into the spare seat of his car and went on, "Just drive to Rivervale. The Rose and Crown. You look quite pale and you need a drink."

"For a moment," said Richard faintly, "I thought I'd never get out of there without needing medical attention. I had no idea that a Professor knew such language!"

"They pick it up over the years from their students," said Lydia.

"You've no idea what he asked Saint Patrick to do to me—with the help of something called the Holy Spectrum."

"Drive, don't talk," said Lydia. "I'm thinking." Richard didn't know it, and some men much older and more experienced than he would not have known it, but Lydia had just uttered the most dangerous words a woman can utter. *Don't talk, I'm thinking.* They always mean that a woman wants something and is determined to have it.

When Lydia returned home that evening, the Professor was waiting up for her. Lydia was late because the restorative drink she had offered to Richard had been reciprocated by an invitation to have dinner with him. She came in, humming gently to herself, her blue eyes sparkling.

The Professor greeted her without preliminaries.

"Damned cheek of that young man, Denby."

"Oh, I don't know," Lydia said airily.

"Well, I do. Damn it—he bid against me for the Sunbeam on Coddy's behalf!"

"He's got nice manners and I like the way his hair goes."

"By all Ireland's green acres, girl! You don't marry a man for that kind of thing. Besides, you can't marry until you're twenty-one without my permission. And anyway, twenty-one or not, if you married a man who had caused so much sorrow to your old father, I'd turn you out—"

"Into the snow?"

"Depends on the time of year. And I'd cut you off without a shilling."

Lydia smiled. "You've been reading some old-fashioned novels, Daddy."

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" They're the best. Anyway, what I mean is you wouldn't get my blessing."

Lydia nodded gravely. " That's different. I'd like your blessing. Why are you so prejudiced against him? You don't know him. It's just like you are with Sir John. He's a nice man —but you persist in fighting each other, when you'd both like to be friends."

" Friends—with that awful money-grubber Coddy! Heaven forbid! And I forbid you to see this young man."

" Sorry, Daddy, I can't refuse to see my employer."

" Employer! "

" Yes. He's given me a job as a car saleswoman. I start tomorrow morning. Could I interest you in a new car? "

" No, you couldn't! " barked the Professor. " There hasn't been a decent car made since 1930! The only car you can interest me in is that 1913 Sunbeam Coddy stole from me."

" Stole? "

" As good as."

" I heard him offering to let you have it for two thousand if you'd support his application for Knight's."

" By the Holy Spectrum—you think I'd do that! Bandy a club membership about for money! Coddy must be losing his grip to imagine such a thing. Sacrilege! "

For a moment Lydia was silent, thinking. Then she said softly, " No two women would behave as stupidly as you two men. Something must be done about it . . . Yes— " there was a faraway look in her eyes—" something must be done."

" I don't know what you're talking about, girl. Go to bed. And you're not to take that job, and you're not to encourage that young Denby."

Lydia came over, kissed the top of his head, and then went off to bed.

The next morning she was at the Denby Garage ready for work at nine o'clock. That the labour relations between employee and employer were going to be amicable was established by the fact that her new boss greeted her in the office with a kiss which Lydia showed no signs of not enjoying.

Nevertheless, as they parted, she said, " One thing I will not do is marry without Daddy's blessing. At the moment, as far as you are concerned, Richard, I might as well enter a nunnery. We must think of something to make him change his mind."

" Of course," said Richard, his eyes on her full of love and admiration, knowing that he had never seen nor ever would see anyone half as lovely. " You do that."

This last sentence proved Richard to be a young man of good

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sense. He knew that changing men's minds was woman's work.

A week later, on a Monday morning, Professor Patrick Walter Fitzharris received in the post a typewritten letter from Sir John Coddinstone which read as follows:

Dear Fitzy,

It was unpardonable of me, of course, to offer to sell you my 1913 *Sunbeam in return for your support to my next application for membership of Knight's. I can only put down my lapse of good taste to stress of emotion.*

However, since I know the strong sporting instincts and the love of a wager which distinguishes all members of Knight's, I am prepared to issue the following challenge. I will race you over a thirty-mile course on Wivenhoe Beach, cars to be used—my 1913 *Sunbeam against your* 1906 *Wolseley-Siddeley. Stakes—if you win, you take the Sunbeam, and if I win, you support my application to Knight's.*

Yours,
Coddy

Surprisingly enough, Sir John Coddinstone also that morning received a letter from the Professor. It read:

Dear Coddy,

I've been thinking about this club affair. The offer you made about Knight's and the Sunbeam was in pretty bad taste, even for you. But underneath I suppose you're not a bad old scout. Tell you what I'll do, I'll give you a sporting chance. I'll wager that in my Wolseley-Siddeley tourer I can beat you in your Sunbeam over a thirty-mile circuit on Wivenhoe Beach. Stakes—if you win, I'll support your application to Knight's, and if I win, I take the 1913 *Sunbeam.*

Give me a ring before I change my mind.

Yours,
Fitzy

Within five minutes Sir John was on the telephone to the Professor.

"Well, Coddy?"

"Well, Fitzy?"

"My Sunbeam will leave your scrapheap miles behind."

"I doubt," said the Professor icily, "whether you'll even get

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that box of chair springs of yours to start. If you do, it'll break up with metal fatigue after a mile."

"I will meet you at Wivenhoe Beach this afternoon at two-thirty to agree a course."

"Do that."

At lunchtime that day the Professor told Lydia—who showed no surprise at the news—about the challenge, and finished, "I'll have to spend some time tuning up the engine, getting everything in racing trim. I wondered if you'd care to give me a hand—that is, if you can spare time from that job of yours which I forbade you to take."

"I shall be glad to help, Daddy. And thank you for inquiring about the job. Yes, I'm doing very well there and I'm very happy in my work."

"You're as devious as your mother was at times," said the Professor. "And almost as good-looking." He smiled at her.

Meanwhile, at Sir John's house the same lunchtime, young Richard Denby was getting his briefing.

"I don't care what you've got on hand at your garage, my boy. Drop everything and get cracking on that Sunbeam. I want it in tiptop condition by next Monday for this race. Spare no expense. If I win, I might put up a little money for your next garage. Might, I said—it depends."

Later that afternoon, the Professor and Sir John met at the beach. Wivenhoe was a five-mile stretch of isolated sand, ideally formed to be the jousting place of these hard-bitten knights of the wheel. The two of them walked the bone-hard sand together, a stiff early spring breeze battering them. They agreed on a course four miles long with a post at each end for turning markers, and they settled for four complete laps.

From the top of the cliffs, Richard and Lydia watched the two men below. Richard, his arm round Lydia, said, "I still don't understand. Only one of them can be the winner. Either the Professor gets the Sunbeam or Sir John gets into the club. How does that help us?"

"You want to marry me, don't you?"

"Of course I do!"

"And you know I won't without my father's blessing. When the parson says, 'If any man can show just cause'—you know the bit—he's capable of jumping up and starting an argument."

"But I still don't understand how this race helps us."

"You will. Now listen and concentrate. What I want from you are two simple mathematical calculations."

Richard listened, his eyes widening, his admiration for Lydia increasing. . .

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So, for the next few days Richard and Sir John worked on the Sunbeam, tuning it up and grooming it into tiptop racing trim. Elsewhere, the Professor and Lydia did the same for the Wolseley-Siddeley.

Oddly enough, when the day of the race came, Lydia, pleading a headache, said she could not go to the race. She felt more like going to bed. She got the Wolseley-Siddeley out of the garage for her father, and he set off for the drive to the beach by himself. The moment he was gone, Lydia's migraine disappeared and she went off to the Denby Garage in Rivervale in the highest of good spirits.

When the Professor arrived at Wivenhoe, Sir John was already there, and with him was Richard Denby.

"Brought Denby along as starter. That all right by you, Fitzy?"

The Professor grunted.

The two cars were lined up alongside the starting post. The long stretch of sands ran smoothly towards the distant cliffs, and far out could be glimpsed the creaming breakers of the sea. A few seabirds wheeled round, crying, and a thin spring sun shone bleakly down. The cars, hoods down for racing, looked magnificent. The Wolseley-Siddeley, its green-and-red body-work sparkling, was a little higher and older fashioned in line than the Sunbeam, whose cream-and-chocolate body gleamed as though it were glowing with some inner health. Brasswork dazzling the eye, they made a magnificent pair.

The Professor pulled on an old motoring cap, donned goggles, and said, "Well, let's get started, and remember, Coddy—the chap who's ahead has the right to cut in. If you don't give way—then by Saint Patrick that's your funeral."

Sir John pulled on a woollen balaclava hat and goggles and said, "I'm not going to be behind at all, so there's no question of me giving way. Denby will count down from ten and then give us the starting gun."

Richard watched the two men climb into their cars. The engine notes increased a little and they sounded solid, throaty, ready to go.

He began to count. "Ten, nine, eight, seven . . ." And as he did so, he hoped fervently that he had worked out correctly the little calculations Lydia had given him. If he'd made a mistake he knew there would be hell to pay from Lydia.

"Three, two, one—"

He fired the starting gun and the engine growls rose to a crescendo and the cars were away, their back wheels spinning for a moment on the hard sand.

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It was a race which Richard was to remember with pleasure all his life. He, too, was a lover of old cars and here, on this lonely beach, to see this road-hardened pair, one from 1906 and the other from 1913, still full of power and fight, spurt away down the hard, yellow sands, was an inspiring sight. They roared away from him, engines and gears whining as the drivers made their changes, their bodyworks flashing red and green, cream and chocolate, the stiff spring wind taking their exhaust fumes, and the sun sparkling on their brasswork. It was a wonderful moment.

Richard walked up the steeply sloping beach to a sandy bluff and pulled out his fieldglasses, training them on the cars.

A quarter of a mile from the start Richard saw that Sir John in the Sunbeam had drawn just ahead of the Professor in the Wolseley-Siddeley and, when he had a clear lead, he pulled over, dead in front of the Professor. At the post marking the turn for the first half-lap, Sir John hugged the corner too tight and went wide as he came round into the straight. The Professor, obviously doing some very quick gear changing, pulled sharply inside him and went ahead by about a length.

The two cars came roaring back up the course and Richard saw that the Sunbeam was again drawing ahead. But Sir John could not get enough lead this time to head the Professor and, with a hungry roar of engines, back wheels flinging up great sprays of sand, they took the turn at the end of the first lap abreast. A mile down the straight of the second lap, Sir John went into the lead and increased it by the time he came to the post. This time he cornered more carefully, holding his ground, and he came roaring up the back end of the lap with the Professor a good hundred yards behind him.

At the end of the third lap, Sir John had a lead of three hundred yards. As the Professor took the turning-post behind him, Richard saw him thumping at the steering-wheel with one hand as though he were a jockey whipping up his mount to greater speed.

Sir John went into the first half of the last lap well ahead. He took the far turn, his lead increasing, and came charging into the home stretch, the sun gleaming on the Sunbeam's brass- and paintwork. Behind him came the Professor, bareheaded now for the wind had swept away his cap.

Then, a mile from home, it happened. Richard saw the Sunbeam suddenly lose speed and then slowly come to a halt. Sir John leapt out and raised the engine cover. As he did so, the Professor, his exultant shout carrying on the wind, one hand raised derisively

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at Sir John, swept by in the Wolseley-Siddeley. But a hundred yards beyond the Sunbeam the Wolseley-Siddeley, too, suddenly lost speed and finally came to a halt. The Professor leapt out, too, and his head was soon stuck into the engine.

Richard walked down towards them. By the time he reached them, both gentlemen had discovered their trouble and Sir John had joined the Professor.

" By the Holy Spectrum! " cried the Professor. " We've both run out of petrol. No race."

" We'll run it again tomorrow." said Sir John.

" Without petrol," said Richard, " you're both in trouble right now."

" Why? " demanded the Professor.

" Because," said Richard, " it'll be high tide in another hour." He nodded out across the sands where the breakers of the fast incoming tide had grown larger. " And even between the three of us we can't push these machines up the steep sand slope from the beach."

" But we must get the cars off the beach! " roared Sir John. " If the tide gets them, they'll be ruined. You're a garage man, get up to the coastguard station and phone your place for a towing vehicle. It can be here in twenty minutes."

Richard went up to the coastguard station and on his way he was congratulating himself on his mathematics. While Lydia and he had been working on their respective cars, they had drilled holes in the petrol tanks nicely and mathematically calculated in diameter, to ensure that there should be a wastage of petrol from the time they unplugged the holes when the cars started for the beach.

Half an hour later, with the tide now coming dangerously close, Lydia arrived, driving a towing vehicle from the garage. She roared down to the beach and drew up by Sir John and her father. She jumped down, a slim, smiling girl, the sky-blue overalls, with *Denby's Garage* in bright red letters across the front, matching the blue of her eyes.

" Get our cars out of here quickly! " cried her father.

Lydia shook her head and tossed the ignition keys of the towing vehicle in her hand. " Not so fast, Daddy. At Denby's we always like to settle the charge for rescue work before we begin."

" Damn the money, Lydia," snorted Sir John. " We'll pay what you ask."

" I know you will. But the job can't be done for cash. Now let's see . . . " Lydia frowned and rubbed a hand thoughtfully across the fair brow.

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"Hurry, Lydia," growled her father. "The tide's coming in fast."

Lydia pulled a sheet of paper from her pocket.

"You'll both have to sign the contract. Here's a pen. I'll read the terms for you. 'In return for salvaging the two cars the following is agreed. One, Professor Patrick Walter Fitzharris agrees to support Sir John Coddinstone in his application for membership of Knight's. And, two, the aforesaid Sir John agrees to sell his Sunbeam to the aforesaid Professor for two thousand pounds.'"

"Blackmail," protested the Professor.

"Extortion!" roared Sir John.

"Good-bye," said Lydia, and began to move towards her vehicle.

Both men shouted together, "Agreed!"

Lydia came back, smiling, and this time she had her arm linked in Richard's. "Also," she said, "the aforesaid Professor agrees to give his permission and unqualified blessing to the marriage of Lydia Annette Fitzharris to Richard Cromwell Sylvester Denby."

"Is this a moment to waste time in idle talk of marriage?" cried the Professor.

"Give me that pen," said Sir John. He took the pen and the contract and signed it. Then he handed them to the Professor.

"Fitzy, old fish," he said, his grey eyes twinkling, "one way and another we've both been done—and by an absolute charmer. Better sign and look happy. Seem to remember that your wife's father didn't think much of you to begin with. But you turned out fairly all right. So will young Denby. How can he go wrong with a girl like Lydia to manage him? Sign."

The Professor raised the pen over the contract, looked from Richard to Lydia, and then, his blue eyes sparkling, grinned.

"Why not? But by Saint Patrick, there's going to be a court of inquiry about this petrol business. Something fishy there."

"Later," said Lydia, as he signed. "Just now we've got work to do. Come on, Richard, let's get these old crocks off the beach."

"Old crocks!" The voices of the Professor and Sir John were raised in a unanimous roar of indignation that drowned for a moment the noise of the breaking surf.

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DUEL CARRIAGEWAY

The old narrow lanes where two cars could barely move without colliding are being replaced by splendid wide roads where six cars at a time can collide easily.

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OUT WEST

O give me a home
where the buffalo roam . . .

I viewed it [Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show] at least three times at the Olympia, over the tracks from where we lived, thrice and perhaps at some years' interval. It is possible my vivid recollection is an amalgam of all the visits merged into one. I saw Calamity Jane (or her who played the part), I admired the breathless dash of the Deadwood Coach—and I was presented to Buffalo Bill himself. The Colonel stood surrounded with imposing, Roman-looking, hexagonal-faced Redskin braves amid odours of horse-dung, tan, sweat, powder and paint. Never since have I felt so honoured at being introduced to anyone, anywhere. It was with a poignant shock I learned in later life that Cody was a poor marksman and used buckshot to bring down the glass globes and balls that flittered opalescent about him.

ALAN HOUGHTON BRODRICK, *Casual Change*

Sioux Later

While taking refreshment, we heard a loud yell,
The whoop of Sioux Indians come up from the dell.
We sprang to our rifles with a flash in each eye.
And says our brave leader, " We'll fight till we die."

They made a bold dash and they come near our train;
The arrows fell around us like showers of rain,
But with our long rifles we fed them hot lead
Till a-many a brave warrior around us lay dead.

In our little band there were just twenty-four,
And of the Sioux Indians five hundred or more;
We fought them with courage, we spoke not a word;
The whoop of Sioux Indians was all could be heard.

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Cowboy Comics

Changing trains on 21 December 1881, at Deming, New Mexico, he (Laurence Oliphant) found himself in a truly "western" atmosphere when "an inebriated cowboy, who had come up from his ranch to enjoy himself, by way of bringing his 'spree' to a satisfactory conclusion, decided to ride through the ladies' waiting-room with a revolver in one hand and a rifle in the other. He had just completed this feat, and was looking round for some human target to his taste when he was accidentally met by the intrepid Sheriff, who happened to be carrying a double-barrelled gun loaded with buckshot, and who then and there—so I was informed by an eye witness—'blew a hole in his heart as big as your fist.' . . . The local paper, describing the incident, says that 'the man fell, remarking that he was a dead man.'"

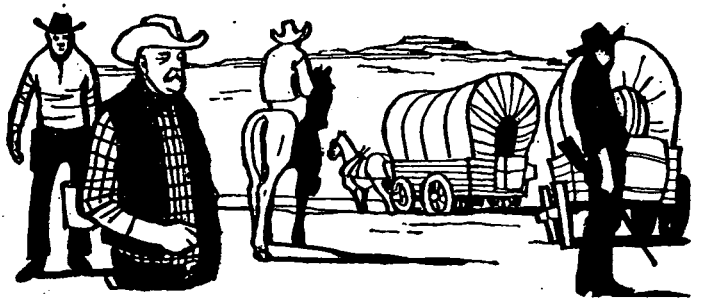
PHILIP HENDERSON, *The Life of Laurence Oliphant*

Brolly-Toter

Out West, they say, a man's a man; the legend still persists
That he is handy with a gun, and careless with his fists.
The fact is, though, you may not hear a stronger word than "Gosh!"
From Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, to Walla Walla, Wash.

The gents who roam the West today are manicured and meek,
They shave their features daily and they bathe three times a week.
They tote the tame umbrella and they wear the mild galosh
From Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, to Walla Walla, Wash.

STODDARD KING, *Etude Géographique*



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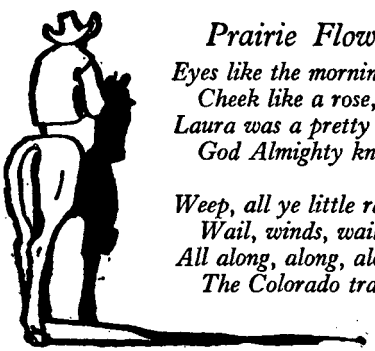
The Gunman

I stepped quiet over to that inner doorway and there he was. He was standing about eight feet in with his back to me. I knew him at once and why people were careful talking about him because there was a big handle-worn forty-five hanging in an oiled old holster at his side and he was just as my father had said, not much on size, but the bare sight of him, standing there straight with a kind of military erectness and a plain completeness within himself told with no mistake he was a goldamned good fighting man in any kind of trouble no matter what side he might be taking.

JACK SCHAEFER, *The Kean Land*



Prairie Flower

Eyes like the morning star,
Cheek like a rose,
Laura was a pretty girl,
God Almighty knows.

Weep, all ye little rains,
Wail, winds, wail,
All along, along, along
The Colorado trail.

Buss-Stop

" Me, I like *first* fun," he said, " all Cajun, they like fun."

" That's the truth of it," Madame Joseph murmured. She was sitting beside him.

Joseph gave her a hearty buss on the cheek, a smack on her rear, and continued. " Then me, I—all Cajuns—like good food. And then good drink. Lots good drink. But not for getting drunk—is not fun." He lifted his glass to us. " Then me, I like, Cajun like, women."

" They seem pretty far down on the list," Ellen observed thoughtfully.

" Is the end of list," Joseph agreed happily, " but is maybe best. All fun. Me, I like all fun."

EMILY KIMBROUGH, *So Near and Yet So Far*

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Sarah Wilson

by

GERALD SPARROW

SARAH WILSON was not a great impostor, but she was a unique impostor. She claimed to be a queen's sister, which took courage in the eighteenth century when such crimes were regarded seriously. There were no alienists to explain that Sarah's strange chicanery was due to a deranged childhood or mental instability. If you pretended to be the Queen's sister and you were not, and had no kind of claim to be in any way related, then you were a simple but dangerous fraud and the law would pursue you, when you were unmasked, with vigour and without mercy.

Moreover nearly any offence that offended the prestige, good name, or interest of the royal family carried the death penalty. If you were in the royal service, or were caught on royal land or in royal palaces, you were not even tried by the ordinary courts. You were tried by a royal court convened within the palace, a court that made its own rules of evidence and procedure, being presided over by an officer of the Crown without the benefit of any jury.

All these ominous facts might have discouraged Sarah, but she was a girl of spirit. As soon as she was a woman—at sixteen in fact—she left her little country village in Staffordshire and her humble home—her father was a bailiff—and set out to seek adventure and excitement in London, as many girls have done since.

The whole of Sarah's remarkable life was influenced by the fact that, very soon after arriving in London, Miss Caroline Vernon, a lady-in-waiting to Queen Charlotte, the wife of George III, took a fancy to her and engaged her as her personal maid. Sarah, a dark, petite creature with black hair and cornflower-blue eyes, was as pretty as a picture and had the nicest manners. She was also quick with her needle and could bake a pie that was really delicious. Obviously a treasure. Miss Vernon took the girl with her wherever she went.

Queen Charlotte lived in the Queen's House which stood

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on the present site of Buckingham Palace. It was a German court, of course. Queen Charlotte spoke to her closest personal friends in German, especially to an elderly lady-in-waiting, a Frau von Schwellenberg, who had accompanied her when she came to Britain to marry the King.

The Queen's little private living-room was called the Green Closet, and as her mistress talked to the Queen of the titbits of the day Sarah would sit behind a screen, listening in. It was as good as the telly two hundred years later.

It is not surprising that Sarah came to love the court and the court people. True the King was not a romantic figure, but he was the King of England and as such was surrounded by that almost mystic air of adulation to which kings become accustomed. The Queen was not an exciting character either, but some of the men around the court made up for the dimness of the two great stars. The smaller satellites were for ever causing a stir. Lord Grosvenor, for instance, had just divorced Mrs. Vernon's elder sister because of her adultery with the Duke of Cumberland. That was something for the Queen to talk about!

Then there was the news from abroad. The American colonists appeared to be getting very restive, but then they were an uncouth lot for the most part. The few "gentlemen" who had emigrated were loyal to the Crown. It was upstarts who had never been received in society who were causing trouble.

This was the life that Sarah grew to love and envy. It was the only life really worth living. Those outside the court circle were drabs. They had few adventures. They hardly ever ran off with other people's wives, or had an orgy at Vauxhall.

Sarah wanted to be a court lady. She knew that was impossible, so she decided that she would become a princess, a phantom princess created only in her own mind it is true, but perhaps, if she had the clothes, many people might believe her. She knew the court jargon, the fashionable little phrases of the moment, the gossip of the Green Closet . . .

One night when everyone was at a levee at St. James's Palace Sarah managed to reach the Green Closet, alone. She told the guard that Mrs. Vernon had forgotten her bag, and needed it at the levee. The guard and the doorman had no doubts. She was admitted.

Queen Charlotte had an amazing collection of personal belongings in the Green Closet. There were fine pictures, by the fashionable Mr. Gainsborough, of her family. There were her personal jewels, including diamond pendants, brooches, and ear-rings, and several fine sapphire rings set in gold, with some delightful brooches of a cheaper kind made up in pinchbeck.

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Sarah tried on a ring. The Queen had delicate hands. It fitted her to perfection. She tried on one of the Queen's dresses. It needed very little taking in to fit Sarah perfectly. Her eye fell on a miniature of the Queen. She put it in her bag. Then she left undetected.

For some strange reason of her own, overbold perhaps, she went back the next night to do a little more stealing. The dress and the ring were not quite enough . . .

Queen Charlotte, like all women who love stones, counted her rings daily. When she discovered that one was missing, she told the servants to keep a careful watch. This was done, and sure enough the next evening Sarah walked straight into the arms of a prowling German servant.

No blandishment could corrupt this wary Teuton and he handed Sarah over to the palace police. Within a week Sarah found herself facing charges of theft and violation of the royal privacy.

The Lord Steward took the most serious view of Sarah's "abominable crime." Without, apparently, any feeling of discomfort he sentenced her to death.

That, however, was a little too much for the good Miss Vernon who pleaded with the Queen for clemency. The King commuted the sentence to deportation overseas to the colonies, and it was as a prisoner that Sarah Wilson, on the nineteenth of July 1768, set sail for the Americas where, on arrival, she was promptly sold as a slave to a Mr. William Devall of Bush Creek, Frederick County, which was, of course, still under the jurisdiction of His Britannic Majesty.

Sarah did not like being a slave of Mr. Devall, or anyone's slave. After a few months of apparent submission, she escaped over the border to the South, carefully taking with her the Queen's dress, her ring, and the miniature—which, with commendable cunning, she had managed to secrete all these years.

The explanation of this was that Sarah, first as a royal prisoner in London, then as a deported convict, then as Mr. Devall's slave, had not been too harshly treated, and no one had thought of depriving her of her bundle of personal belongings. Nor were they pried into. She had been sentenced to death, but she had not been outraged. She was still a person.

As soon as Sarah began to breathe in the warm Southern air and move among the gentlemen of the South she promptly decided to become what she had always wanted to be: a princess, the Princess Susanna Carolina Mathilda, in fact. She was, she said, a sister of the Queen of England who had quarrelled with the family because of some escapade. As she said this, Sarah's

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delightful eyes twinkled with mischief, and what Southern gentleman would not offer his hospitality to so enchanting—and highborn—a creature? The ladies of the house might not be so keen on Sarah, but the men overruled them, as it was possible to do in those gracious, virile days.

The first gentleman to ask Sarah to stay with the family was a Mr. Smyth, a wealthy Virginian landowner. Sarah fitted into the life perfectly. She was sweet to the gentlemen, kind to the slaves, and even considerate to the ladies. Her stories of the English court were obviously genuine. There was the Queen's miniature in her pretty little hands. She was a child, really, in need of protection, Mr. Smyth declared.

Sarah moved around after staying some months with the Smyths. Other Southern families vied with one another to offer her hospitality. And this revealed to Sarah a pleasing trait in the American character, a passion for hospitality, and a firm belief that nearly everything and everybody from the old country, as it then was, was genuine and precious. There have been other adventurers since who have done just what Sarah did. Quite recently a goodlooking young man, calling himself Uma of Siam, enjoyed weeks of free and expensive living with the élite of Hollywood. Sarah was a pioneer.

Princess Susanna became all the rage in Southern society. Not to have had the Princess to stay as a house guest was something of a slur. Sarah, who was good at embroidery, in more senses than one, had all her clothes and linen embroidered with a crown and her personal monogram. The evidence of authenticity multiplied.

Moreover the Princess was so generous, always ready to help. Although she had quarrelled with the family, she was still, it seems, influential. A word to a minister from Sarah could work wonders. At this time all power, patronage, and prestige was in London, and the American colonists were dependent, in many ways, on the goodwill of the English Government for advancement and for money. Sarah promised every kind of reward, very confidentially, of course. Posts in the Governor-General's office, commissions in the Army, preferment in the Church—Sarah could procure them all, but it was expensive, she explained, and Sarah, whom we really must call Princess Susanna, began to draw in a very considerable income for her benefactions.

Sarah was riding high on waves of social prestige and considerable wealth. Then, as the promises that had been made failed to materialise, the more sceptical started to inquire about the Princess. It was learnt that the Queen's sister, fifteen years older than Sarah—and not nearly as glamorous—lived in seclusion

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in Neustrelitz. Her name: Christina Sophia Albertina. It looked bad for Sarah, but there was not yet enough evidence to denounce her. Sarah was bold and clever.

More menacing moves were being set in motion against Sarah. Mr. Devall, annoyed by the escape of his pretty little slave, and hearing of Princess Susanna, employed an attorney, a Mr. Dalton, to track Sarah down.

On the eleventh of October 1773 a strange advertisement was posted throughout the South. This was it:

Run away from the subscriber a servant maid (!) Sarah Wilson, now calling herself Susanna Carolina Mathilda, and pretending to be Her Majesty's sister. She has rolled black hair, a slight blemish in the left eye, and marks all her clothes with a Crown and the letter B. Whoever shall return the said servant girl to me shall receive five pistoles, besides all charges and costs.

It was signed, with his address at Bush Creek, *William Devall.*

Mr. Dalton traced Sarah in the end and returned her to Mr. Devall to resume her slavery. That should have been the end of Sarah. She should have ended up as a faithful retainer of the Devalls whom the younger generation teased and bullied. But it was not to be. By the oddest coincidence another Sarah Wilson was deported as a slave from England. Our Sarah promptly substituted this girl for herself, and escaped again, this time to the North.

This time too Mr. Devall was unable to pursue her, for war had broken out and Mr. Devall had become a lieutenant in the Maryland Militia to fight for the revolution.

Sarah was not the girl to ignore the tempestuous time of war which brought many young officers of His Majesty to fight in the colonies, among others a Mr. Talbot, a young man of good family, in the Sixteenth Regiment of Light Dragoons.

Sarah promptly married Talbot, and gave him a family. They lived at 1 Bowery Lane, New York. Mr. Talbot continued with the colours until 1782, when he retired—to become a businessman. It was all, one feels, in the American tradition. The emigration, the courage, the fighting, and, finally, the family and the good husband starting up in the export and import business.

Sarah made an excellent wife. She had the miniature of the Queen hung in her boudoir and always retained, even as an old lady, that air of faint, enigmatic condescension that seems to linger in those brought up in court circles. © Gerald Sparrow 1962

From "The Great Impostors" by Gerald Sparrow to be published in August by John Long.

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A new Rosewarne story

Shot in the Dark

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By John Salt

RANDALL JEROME FERRIS turned at bay, gun in hand, on the very steps of Holborn Central Police Headquarters. His back to a Wanted poster, he took careful aim at the approaching plainclothes sergeant and squeezed the trigger without further thought or compunction. The heavy-calibre bullet kicked a three-inch sliver of stone from the pavement and brought Sergeant Manbre to an incredulous halt. The revolver jumped from Randall's hand and exploded again on the pavement, the second bullet whanging away in ricochet to daub a bright streak on the brick wall of the police station.

Randall, aged six, burst into tears as the sergeant reached him.

Manbre, white and shaken, was still comforting the child when the station sergeant came bundling down the steps, followed by two constables and the Divisional Superintendent, Edward Rosewarne. While Randall's howls still rent the Sunday calm of Otway Street, Rosewarne quietly picked up the revolver and broke open the magazine. No cartridges remained in the cylinder. He handed the gun to the Sergeant and gave a brief order to the two constables. Manbre scooped up the child and carried him into the station.

There was no problem of identification. Both Rosewarne and Manbre knew perfectly well that Randall was the son of Jim Ferris, the stage doorkeeper at the old Georgian Theatre at the Kingsway end of Drury Lane. What took longer to establish was how a six-year-old came to be stalking Otway Street in possession of an Army Colt date-stamped 1917.

Finally Rosewarne decided to take the boy home to his parents. The Ferrises lived in a block of flats off Southampton Row. Jim opened the door to them in his braces; his wife took one look at the policemen, then swooped on her offspring. Randall burst into fresh bawls occasioned as much by woes anticipated as past.

Neither parent had ever seen the gun before. Rosewarne asked about the theatre, and Ferris admitted that the boy spent most of his time there while his mother was at work.

Randall peered cautiously around a large slice of bread and jam to interject, " Coal hole."

Mrs. Ferris brightened. " That's it. He came home the other day looking like a coalminer. I could have beaten the daylights out of him."

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Randall nodded sagely. "That's where I found it. Can I have some more bread and jam, Mum?"

Mrs. Ferris batted a weary blow at her son which failed to connect. Resignedly she began to cut more bread. Ferris said thoughtfully, "Edna's right, he did get in there. But I don't know what a gun would be doing down there, the place hasn't been opened in years."

He stopped suddenly in evident horror. "I tell a lie though—your people searched it a twelve-month back after that girl Lucy Stowe was killed in Congreve Mews behind the theatre. Here, you don't think—"

"I don't think anything at all," Rosewarne said crisply. "Go on about the cellar. How is it secured—bolts, locks, what?"

"It was boarded up, inch-thick planks across the door. The nipper found a crowbar in the basement and prised them off. He's got some strength, you know."

"What entry from the street?"

"There's a manhole for the delivery chute, but that's cemented in since we switched to oil fuel. There's a small pavement grating too, for the damp, you know. It's a safety precaution."

"I know," Rosewarne agreed heavily. "And on the question of safety, Mr. Ferris, you'd do well to check your son's toybox once in a while. I nearly lost a sergeant this afternoon. You could have lost a son. I'll be seeing you again in the morning. Come on, Jack, you can blow off your steam outside."

When Manbre entered Rosewarne's office next day the Superintendent had the gun, two bullets, and a number of photographs laid out on the blotter before him. He poked the slugs with the stem of his pipe.

"Army pattern," he remarked conversationally. "Steel jacketed; case-hardened; .45 calibre; date of manufacture, some time 1914–18; traces of rust fairly recent, also oil. Some interesting lateral scores on them." He pushed the gun towards Manbre. "Look down the barrel against the light, you can see what caused them."

Manbre said eagerly, "Is it the same gun?"

"No doubt about it." He separated the two bullets. "That one we recovered undamaged from yesterday afternoon. The other was taken from poor Lucy Stowe. The lateral scores are duplicates exactly—same angle, same depth of incision. You can check it with the pictures as well."

"I'm no expert, sir. I'll take your word for it."

"Don't take mine; the report came from MacEvoy in Ballistics. Tell me about the Stowe case, Jack. How the dickens did they miss finding the gun?"

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JOHN SALT—" born 1922 which sounds nicer than saying I'm forty "—dairy-farmed in Essex until the war when he joined the Navy and served with the Patrol Service. Sent to America, he helped commission a flotilla of small gunboats, sailing them by devious routes to Trinidad.

Demobbed, he answered a newspaper advertisement and was accepted on a textile journal, ending up as editor. He married, resigned, wandered in and out of various newspaper and magazine appointments and is now assistant editor of a famous London glossy, with a seven year old son and a daughter who writes fairy stories for a select circle of friends.

Off duty, he mows grass, paints the house, dries the dishes, and is currently re-teaching himself arithmetic so that he and daughter Linden can pass the eleven-plus.

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" Inspector Burden was in charge," Manbre said defensively. " It was a couple of months before he retired."

" Enough said. Give me the rundown."

While the sergeant talked, Rosewarne made brief pencilled notes, checking Manbre's statement against the year-old file on the case which lay open on his desk. Lucy Stowe was a twenty-year-old typist with a craze for pop records which had brought her into touch with a club off the Charing Cross Road.

They had begun investigations there, learning from the proprietor, Lucas Valerian, that the dead girl had spent every evening at the club for the better part of three months until the Christmas of 1959. He had never seen her since and he knew of no special friends. There was nothing distinctive about Lucy Stowe that would have made Valerian remember her above a hundred others. A hunch of his shoulders and a flicker of his cautious eyes had indicated that with him these things were a matter of business. Young people came and went, the craze passed and was replaced by the next new thing.

Manbre had had no greater success with either Lucy's parents or her few acquaintances. All repeated Valerian's words; Lucy was reserved, with no special friends. Yet she had known somebody well enough to keep an appointment with him on a wet February evening in the mews at the back of the Georgian.

" An appointment, you say, Jack? "

" Somebody waited for her, sir; we found about a dozen cigarettes scattered over a small area where a single smoker would have thrown them down. I reckon he was there for over an hour."

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"So it's a man."

"I think so, sir. Lucy was going to have a baby. Surely, that was the motive for killing her."

Rosewarne looked dubious and Manbre hurried on. "A certain kind of man might do it, sir. Say he was married or in some important position where he couldn't cover up. Anyway, it was a panic killing—he ditched the gun only ten feet from the place where Lucy fell."

"That's the part I don't like, Jack. Inspector Burden was a terror for detail. He'd have turned that place upside-down."

"He did, sir, but the fact is that at the time that coal cellar was in use—chock-a-block—and the walls black as your hat with grime and coal dust. It's been empty now for the best part of a year, and that child had prised out bricks from the back of the old chimney-breast and found the gun wedged in the base of a small flue. There was no sign from the main shaft that this flue existed. Whoever it was struck very lucky when he dropped the gun in there."

"You had ideas of your own about who it might be?"

"Not exactly, but I wonder if there isn't somebody at that club who must have a pretty good idea of the answer."

"So do I. Get your coat, Jack, we'll go and talk to Valerian."

"And what about the theatre?"

"It'll keep. Let's see what Valerian remembers after a year without us . . ."

Lucas Valerian was a small, compactly-built man with tiny feet encased in midnight-blue suede shoes. His suit fitted him with a seal-like sleekness, the long, rolled lapels framing a grey-striped suit worn with a blue polka-dot bow tie. He looked like a Chicago gangster of the Prohibition era and the effect was further heightened by a bruise on his right cheekbone that darkened his olive skin angrily and threatened already to engulf the eye above. If the appearance of police on his doorstep fazed Valerian, he did not show it, but politely ushered Rosewarne and Manbre through to a dark little office.

He clicked on a desk lamp and white light flooded down on a saucer containing a strip of steak which leaked blood. He gave the policemen a twisted grin, said cheerfully, "You'll excuse me," clapped the meat to his eye, and sat down at the desk.

"I suppose you're here about last night's little rumble. Nothing to it really, just the lads feeling their oats. I got the worst of it as you can see, but I have my club to think about so I'll tell you anything you want to know."

Rosewarne stared at him curiously. "You are not English, Mr. Valerian, your accent—?"

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" I'm not a British subject; what's that between friends? I suppose I'm entitled to the same protection."

" Of course. You say you've had some trouble. No complaint has been made to my knowledge. I think we are talking at cross-purposes. The sergeant and I are here to ask you a few questions about a girl that you used to know. Name of Lucy Stowe."

Valerian did it supremely well. Rosewarne had rarely seen a reaction more splendidly contrived: the ten-second pause, the expression of polite mystification, the genuine relief as recollection dawned, the easy natural laugh, and the completely unforced rejoinder. " But that's over a year ago—you surely don't think I can tell you any more? "

Rosewarne said brutally, " We've found the gun, Valerian."

For a fraction of a second the façade shimmered, but Valerian's voice was completely under control as he replied, " It has taken you long enough. Anyway, it has nothing to do with me."

" It was smothered in fingerprints," Rosewarne said, with perfect truth.

Valerian threw down the steak. " None of them were mine," he shouted.

" But of course not. You had nothing to do with the murder, had you, Mr. Valerian? "

Valerian stared at Rosewarne with hot eyes, then recovered his temper, even smiled. " It's no use playing the cat and the mouse with me, Superintendent. I told your people all I knew; I have nothing to add."

Rosewarne stood up and nodded to Manbre. He said carefully, " You understand that there are penalties for withholding information from the police, Mr. Valerian? "

" Threats, Mr. Rosewarne. You exceed your powers."

Rosewarne turned and favoured him with what his closer associates described as " Ted's hanging smile." " I never threaten, Mr. Valerian; sometimes I promise. Think about it, won't you."

As they left, Rosewarne said to Manbre, " Notice an odd smell in there? "

" His hair oil," Manbre said disenchantedly.

" Not hair oil, Jack—fear, the smell of fear. It makes a man sweat."

The Georgian Theatre is a cosy, rococo affair with a glass and girder canopy that covers the front of the house and also extends along the Drury Lane side to shelter two-thirds of the gallery queue. Inside there is much gilt and plush and cherubic plaster,

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along with two magnificent cut-glass chandeliers that had been Napoleonic loot.

The place was run by the much-loved musical comedy actress Venetia Tamlin and her leading man, the impeccable Crispin Monk. In the public mind their names were indissolubly linked. Most people thought them married, though Rosewarne, who had a nodding acquaintance with Monk, knew that the actor led an uneventful bachelor existence in an Essex fishing village between commitments at the Georgian, while Venetia was in private life Mrs. James Paterson.

Rosewarne and Manbre entered by the stage door on the Lane side. Ferris poked his head out at them as they passed his cubbyhole. Rosewarne nodded to the sergeant. "You look after Ferris, Jack; get him to show you the coal hole afterwards. I'll join you there later on." To Ferris he said, "I'd like to see Miss Tamlin."

The stage doorkeeper picked up a telephone and talked into it, then nodded to Rosewarne. "I've announced you. Go straight through, sir. Take the gallery on the right, then first door left."

Rosewarne tramped the uncarpeted boards, smelling dust and scenery paint; dim pilot lights glowed above, from afar came the faint tinkling of a piano. His steps were light and the sounds of the quarrel were clearly audible even before he reached Venetia's dressing-room. His hand was poised to knock when something smashed against a wall inside.

A woman's voice said sharply, "That won't get you anything, Jimmy. I see enough dramatics every day of my life." A man's voice rumbled indistinctly and ended shockingly on a sob. The woman spoke again, wearily this time. "It's no use, I tell you. There has to be an end to everything, and this is it."

Rosewarne walked silently to the corner of the gallery, then came back treading heavily. The voices ceased, and his knock fell on silence. Then the door opened and a man came out. He was tall and a little too fleshy, dressed in a single-breasted grey checked suit and tan shoes. His thick grey hair was combed flat back across a high, bony skull, his face was flushed, his eyes, like an angry child's, showed traces of tears. He smiled defiantly at Rosewarne with a flash of strong white teeth beneath a clipped military moustache. The Superintendent was conscious of great charm.

"Mr. Paterson?" he said at a venture.

"The same, dear boy." The words were drawled, their tone authoritative. "You'll find my wife inside. I suppose it's her you want to see?"

Rosewarne nodded.

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Paterson cocked his head to one side and grinned engagingly. "Ah well, I guessed as much; nobody ever comes to see me. Hope you get the part, old boy." He pushed the door wider and called through it. "Visitor for you, my dear."

Rosewarne entered the room. The place reeked of cellulose, and he noticed the splash of nail varnish on the wall and the fragments of a bottle lying against the skirting.

Rosewarne's first thought was that the photographs of Venetia Tamlin scarcely did her justice. The sun through the window behind her set red lights in the copper of her hair and gilded the fair skin of her bare neck and shoulders. A string of stage jewellery hung like fresh blood droplets against the white of her bodice; paste emeralds and amethysts glittered among the panniers of her full-hooped skirt over its layers of petticoats. Her face was pale but unlined, her neck rose in a miraculous column without sag or wrinkle. She looked thirty-five at most though she must be—Rosewarne checked himself guiltily.

She glanced ruefully down at her costume, then said in the famous husky voice, "I'm sorry about the glad-rags, I've just had a fitting. There's a rehearsal this afternoon—come and watch it; this stuff looks good enough behind the lights."

"It could never look better than it does now, Miss Tamlin."

"Well, there's a fine speech from a policeman. Sit down if you like, I have to stand up in this thing." She went to her dressing-table and picked up a packet of cigarettes. Rosewarne lit one for her and she began to smoke nervously.

"I met your husband coming out."

She watched the window. "You overheard our quarrel? I'm sorry to spoil the illusion."

Rosewarne said without evasion, "You don't have to talk about it."

"I suppose not." She turned to him again. "My husband's a fool and so am I. But this is wasting your time. You've come about this silly gun business?"

"You've heard about it, of course?"

She waved a hand vaguely. "It's all over the theatre. That little horror Randall Ferris found it, but I honestly don't see what I can tell you."

"Probably nothing at all. This is routine, you understand, Miss Tamlin? We talk to everybody."

"And find out everything?"

"We are rarely so fortunate. It occurred to me that the gun might have been a stage prop."

"That's not at all likely, Superintendent. You couldn't kill anybody with a stage gun."

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"What makes you think this gun killed anybody, Miss Tamlin?"

"Goodness, I didn't say that!"

"No more you did," Rosewarne agreed calmly. "However, I should like you to look at it." He took the gun from his raincoat pocket, peeled off the cloth that covered it, and held it out on a flat hand. "Have you ever seen it before, Miss Tamlin?"

She stared at it for a long moment, then looked away. "No, never."

"You are sure of that?"

She said with a rising inflection, "Have you any reason to think I would lie about it?"

"None at all," he assured her honestly. "So in your view this gun has no connection with the theatre?"

"I can't be as definite as that, obviously. Does it really matter?"

He pocketed the gun. "I think it does," he said slowly. "You see, this gun killed a girl called Lucy Stowe only a hundred yards from your own stage door. It happened a year ago; do you remember?"

She said dully, "I think that is rather horrible."

"There is never anything pleasant about murder."

"Are you going now?"

"From you, yes. We shall need to question some of your permanent staff again, but that shouldn't take too long. You can go on with the rehearsal. Tell me, is Mr. Monk in the theatre?"

"Not today. It's only costumes and lighting; his understudy will stand in." She paused, then said breathlessly, "Crispin can't tell you anything."

"Perhaps not. Thank you for giving me so much of your time, Miss Tamlin." She nodded absently.

Rosewarne went out and clattered down a spiral staircase into the bowels of the theatre, wondering as he went whether it would be his fate that day to interview only frightened people.

Manbre, dusting his grimy hands against each other, met him at the door of the coal cellar. "Take a look in here, sir. Shine your torch again, will you, Ferris?"

Yellow afternoon sunlight filtered down through the pavement grille. Rosewarne craned his neck at Manbre's bidding and saw a circular rim of blackened brick about three feet below the manhole cover.

Manbre said, beside him, "That's where the boy found it—there's a hole up there where a brick has been dislodged. The gun came down at an angle and stuck in the crevice. Sheerest fluke, of course; you can't see inside from above or below."

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Rosewarne grunted. " The place was searched. It won't look good in the papers, Jack. All right, you can get back to your office, Ferris." The stage doorkeeper scuttled away and Rosewarne asked, " Get anything new from him, Jack? "

" Not a lot; repetition mainly."

" Any gossip? "

" That, of course. He worships Venetia and thinks the world of Monk. They all do, of course."

" What about Paterson? "

" I gather he's a grade-one louse who lives off his wife and rides pretty roughshod over the others . . . He and Monk don't hit it off. I've seen most of the statements: nothing exciting. I don't think there's anything here for us, sir. Somebody killed Lucy and ditched the gun. There's no link with the theatre that I can see."

Rosewarne said mildly, " We haven't started yet, Jack. Inspector Burden slipped up over the gun, but that's a year ago. Let's take it from this morning. What's the most puzzling thing that's struck you so far? "

" That yarn Valerian spun us," Manbre said promptly. " There wasn't any trouble at his place last night, but he'd taken a beating just the same."

" That being the case, make him your first job. That accent of his foxes me—could be French, I suppose. Do a bit of digging, find out all you can about him. There may be other points that Burden missed."

" What about you, sir? "

" A trip to Bush House, I think, just to look at some company records. It can be very interesting." He smiled at Manbre's blank expression and walked back up the stairs.

They met again in the early evening in Rosewarne's office at Holborn Central. The sergeant seemed elated, though he began his recital with a warning: " You're not going to like this much, sir."

" Try me," Rosewarne invited.

Sergeant Manbre laid a sheaf of papers and two photographs on the desk. He tapped the pictures. " They were wired from Paris this afternoon. The rest is a typed transcript of a conversation over the telephone to the Sûreté."

Rosewarne grunted, " Purporting to show—? "

" That Lucas Valerian is a French subject named Paul Mélèze, born in Algiers in 1919, various terms of imprisonment there and in Marseilles and Paris. Last conviction, 1954. He left France in that year and came to London."

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" Charges? "

Manbre took a deep breath. " Narcotic smuggling, money with menaces, blackmail."

" Narcotics," Rosewarne echoed sourly. " It has taken us a year and more to find that out." He leafed through the report. " What about women? "

" He ran a jazz club once in St-Germain-des-Près and farmed out marijuana. Plenty of girls there."

" Lucy Stowes, in fact."

" Could be, sir, though I doubt if he killed Lucy. We might throw a scare into him, make him talk."

Rosewarne shook his head. " We couldn't scare him enough. That's for somebody else to do."

" Who, for example, sir? "

" That's a damn good question, Jack," Rosewarne said savagely.

The desk phone rang. Rosewarne barked into it, then slammed the receiver back on its rest. He said grimly, " Venetia Tamlin and Crispin Monk are on their way up."

" Do you know what they want, sir? "

" Certainly. To explain away a choice piece of perjury. Take a look at that." He handed Manbre a sheet of flimsy and stood up as a uniformed constable showed Venetia and her leading man, Crispin Monk, into the room.

The actor's movements were rapid and nervous, but he seemed completely in command of himself and of the situation. Even Rosewarne lost stature beside this tall, lean, hawk-nosed man with his sleek white-winged black hair. Venetia sat down in the chair Rosewarne placed for her, then turned her head towards Monk.

The actor spoke crisply. " We owe you an apology, Superintendent. The gun belonged to Miss Tamlin's father, now dead. She failed to recognise it when you showed it to her."

Rosewarne took the slip of paper from Manbre and handed it to Monk without speaking. The actor nodded. " I guessed you would find a record. He kept it licensed until his death, then Venetia locked it away and forgot about it."

Rosewarne said harshly, " Until when? "

Venetia spoke eagerly. " Until this morning, Mr. Rosewarne."

" This time you're telling me the truth? "

" I swear it. When you showed me the gun, I couldn't believe it. Afterwards, you told me it had killed a girl and I was frightened. When you left, I went home and looked in the drawer where it was kept. It had gone." She spread her hands in a charming gesture.

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" It won't do, Miss Tamlin. I mentioned nothing about the killing until after you had denied recognising the gun."

" I feared some sort of a scandal. Now I'm telling the truth. Won't you forgive me? "

Rosewarne said tightly, " Get rid of the idea that this is a play, Miss Tamlin. I am a police officer investigating a particularly heartless and brutal murder. Now please answer two simple questions. When did you miss the gun and who are you trying to protect? "

Monk said softly, " I'll answer that. She missed it six months ago and she is trying to shield her husband."

She wailed at him, " Crispin, you promised."

" That doesn't count now, my dear. You heard the superintendent."

" Let's hear the rest of it, Mr. Monk."

The actor drew himself up to his full height, and said quietly, " There's not much more to tell. I'm a prejudiced witness; so much is obvious. Paterson had access to the drawer. I think he took the gun, but I don't know why, unless to show off before his friends."

" What sort of friends? "

He shrugged. " Scum mostly, barflies, hangers-on."

" And the women," Venetia said suddenly and bitterly. " Don't forget the women." She stared defiantly at Rosewarne. " I'm not acting now. I only wish there was more to tell you but it's a silly story, silly and sordid. I've covered up his peccadilloes for years—because I love him; that's a laugh on the great Venetia Tamlin, isn't it? " She stood up suddenly, superbly regal, almost triumphant. " But none of it is criminal, remember that. Jimmy is a child, a nasty, foolish little boy who weeps and smashes things when—when toys are refused. And afterwards he is sorry, so very sorry."

" Like this morning."

She nodded. " He wanted money. I wouldn't give it to him."

" Could he get it without coming to you? "

She stiffened. " Why do you ask that? "

" I have been looking through your company register. You and your husband both own quarter shares in the Georgian. Either one can sell out with the agreement of the chief shareholder. That's you, Mr. Monk. Has Paterson approached you? "

" This afternoon," the actor said bleakly.

" And you refused him? "

" Naturally. I was in no mood to help him."

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"That being so, only two more questions remain. I can answer the second and you, I think, Mr. Monk, can tell me the other. Did you know about Lucy Stowe?"

Venetia turned to the actor, her lips moving silently. Monk ignored the appeal. "I knew about poor Lucy. Knew, that is, that Paterson was running after her." He hesitated. "I saw her the night she died, near the theatre. He was always scared she'd go to see Venetia."

"For God's sake, man, why didn't you say so at the time?"

"I couldn't hurt Venetia."

"You're doing it now."

"That's different. Now she is directly involved."

Venetia said quietly, "Crispin knew the gun had gone, that Jimmy had taken it, but he did not report it to you."

Rosewarne said incredulously, "You knew the gun had gone?"

The actor squared his shoulders. "I did. The gun would have stayed there in the cellar till the Georgian tumbled about our ears—but for the Ferris boy."

Venetia said wretchedly, "The girl was going to have a baby. That would have finished everything between us, and Jimmy knew it—no more money, no more protection. He had to stop her reaching me."

"Paterson met Lucy at Valerian's," Rosewarne said slowly.

"There's still nothing to connect them, sir," Manbre objected.

"You're wrong there, Jack. That's the answer to the other question. I found out today that Paterson has been pouring money into Valerian's club for a year past. On paper he owns the place. Now work it out with me. When young Ferris found the gun, Paterson went round there and put Valerian's eye in a sling to remind him to keep his mouth closed. Then we arrived and told Valerian it was the murder gun. He got the wind up and probably phoned Paterson and asked for a lot of money in a hurry, perhaps for a flit across the Channel. Paterson goes to his wife and to Mr. Monk, but gets no money. Who's the more frightened man of the two, do you suppose?"

Venetia said sharply, "Not my husband. You'd have to know him as well as I do to understand that."

Monk broke in, "That's true. There's a sort of divine irresponsibility about him. Whether it's a money scrape or a woman scrape, he's always perfectly certain that he'll get out of trouble."

Manbre said doubtfully, "If Valerian really had the black on Paterson, would Paterson go round there and attack him?"

"The case is full of holes, Jack. I know that, but the fact remains that I think that's what happened."

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" Then shouldn't we go round to Valerian's now, sir? "

" And do what? We couldn't arrest a pussycat on the evidence so far." He turned to Monk. " You had better take Miss Tamlin home."

She said with a tremor, "Does forgiveness go with dismissal, Superintendent? "

He answered heavily, " A little help is worth a deal of forgiveness. But I can't promise you won't hear more of this."

" I see," she said bravely. " In that case, Crispin . . ." He took her arm and they went out.

Rosewarne and Manbre sat late, drinking coffee and endlessly sorting and piecing the intractable shapes in the puzzle.

Soon after one, Crispin Monk telephoned. Manbre, listening on an extension, caught the note of strain in the actor's voice. " It's Venetia. She hasn't been to rehearsal this evening—and she's gone from her flat."

Rosewarne barked peremptorily, " Talk sense, man, and talk it fast. Gone where? "

" I can't explain over the phone. Something has happened here, can you come? It's Abertillery Mansions, Victoria Embankment. The penthouse."

Rosewarne grabbed overcoat and hat, and dashed from the room with Manbre close on his heels . . .

Monk received them distractedly, all trace of mannerism gone. He had found the door of the flat ajar and Venetia missing.

" That's not all, Superintendent. Take a look in here."

He threw open a door and the two policemen stepped into the main living-room. Papers littered the floor, every drawer had been wrenched out and the door of a wall safe stood wide.

Monk gestured at it. " I don't know how much money she kept in there, but it's empty now."

Rosewarne nodded. " Get looking, Jack. She didn't do this herself." He glanced at Monk. " Does Miss Tamlin have a car? "

The actor blinked, then nodded. " It's out of the garage, I checked with the night porter."

Rosewarne turned to Manbre. " Found something, Jack? "

The sergeant pushed a crumpled sheet of paper at him. " Under the hall door, sir."

Rosewarne smoothed it out and began to read:

Dear Venetia, Unfortunately you had no money here so I shall have to. settle things another way. Don't worry, I shan't come back—Jimmy.

Rosewarne said flatly, " Not much doubt about that, is there? "

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"He went after Valerian?"

"And she went after Paterson. She'd have heard enough at the station tonight to make the connection. Time's wasting, Jack. Let's get moving."

Rosewarne moved across to the telephone. He dialled the Holborn Central number and spoke crisply. "Station Sergeant? Rosewarne here. I want three men and a squad car down to Valerian's place in Arroll Court double quick. I'll be there myself in ten minutes. Meantime, they are to sit tight. The place is a cul de sac and I want the entrance to Charing Cross Road sealed. Nobody goes in or comes out, do you understand that?" He hesitated a moment, then said briefly, "And, Sergeant, issue firearms for two."

He slammed down the receiver and made for the door with Manbre. The police car driver raced his engine as they piled into the back. Monk plunged in after them, and neither man tried to prevent him.

The entrance to Arroll Court seemed full of men and shadows. The second squad car was pulled across the pavement blocking egress, and Venetia's baby blue saloon was parked against the kerb behind it, with sidelights burning.

Rosewarne pushed his way through to the court. Monk tried to follow, but was held back. Ahead they could hear Venetia calling in a small, frightened voice. She stood outside the door of Valerian's club, beating at it ineffectually with gloved hands. Rosewarne pulled her away from the door and she turned on him, half weeping.

"Make them open the door, Superintendent; Jimmy is in there. I'm so frightened of what he'll do."

Rosewarne passed her gently to Manbre. "Take her back to the car, Jack. Do it as quietly as you can."

In a few moments Manbre returned, walking softly, and Rosewarne whispered, "Do you think they've heard us in there?"

"Maybe not, sir. The office is at the back. What are you going to do?"

"A little breaking and entering. Get a couple of the others up here behind me, but tell them to keep it low. There's probably a conversation going on inside that I'd give my division to hear."

He slipped a hand inside his overcoat pocket and produced a flat strip of case-hardened steel. Manbre watched him wedge it between lock and jamb, feeling for the slope of the catch. He gave a satisfied grunt and began to put pressure on the lever. "There are only two chances in life, Jack; you're either a copper

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or a crook. This is where one's early training comes in handy." The steel spoon slipped and he lurched against the door, cursing softly. Then from inside the house came a sharp, dry crack like wood snapping.

As one man, Rosewarne and Manbre hurled themselves at the door. It resisted the first thrust, and the second; then the latch burst from its fastening inside and they shot straight into the hall. Light blazed from a wide-open door at the far end of the passage and they headed for it at a run.

Rosewarne was first inside the room, his nostrils twitching to the acrid scent of gun smoke. Grey-trousered legs protruded from the angle made by Valerian's desk against the wall. Rosewarne knelt to peer at the grey-faced, grotesque huddle.

He looked up and met Manbre's incredulous gaze. "That beauty had no more than a minute's start of us. He's still in the house. I don't want a shooting match, so take it easy."

Manbre nodded. "We'll flush him out, sir." He looked down at the man on the floor.

Rosewarne said shortly, "He's dead. Pass the word to the wireless car; I need more men for this caper. And, Jack, get me a gun."

He went into the hall and detailed the three men there to begin their search.

As Manbre came back at a run, Rosewarne snatched the automatic from him and made for the stairs. With his foot on the first tread, he jerked out, "What about the back?"

"We checked that first thing, sir. No exit, it's a blind well. This place is a fire trap."

"Death trap, more like," Rosewarne grunted, and began to climb.

Upstairs the house smelled of cheap scent and powder carelessly used, of old clothes and of people, faintly of escaping gas, and of an overall rottenness that went deep down into the timber and brick. Naked bulbs glared against walls on which people had scrawled, and on the first floor each sad, anonymous room they entered contained the same furniture—a chair, a battered dressing-table with a brown-mottled mirror, and an iron bed with sagging springs and doubtful linen. But no man hiding, nor any place to hide in.

On the second floor it was the same, and on the third. Finally only twin attics remained, two tiny rooms, each with a slanting wall that was the roof, joined by a communicating door. Both were crammed with broken musical instruments—a jazz drummer's set, a crushed bass fiddle, an ancient upright piano—all piled and heaped over with stacks of sheet music and records that

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flowed and cascaded in great sheaves to the floor. But no sign of any man.

Rosewarne pushed into the farther room and kicked open wood-and-glass doors that gave on to a narrow strip of leads. Behind him the grey slate roof soared steeply upwards into the night. Rosewarne looked at it thoughtfully. "Nobody has been up there in the last ten minutes," he decided.

"But he must be in the house," Manbre objected.

Rosewarne seized his arm in a steel grip. "He's given us the slip, damn him," he said in a loud voice. Then he pushed the sergeant before him into the first attic. Below them they could hear the others, tramping noisily from room to room, coming closer.

Rosewarne put his head through the door and yelled, "Nothing up here, lads. Stay put till I come down."

He stood rigidly, still gripping Manbre's arm, his face hard as marble in the narrow shaft of light that streamed from the bare bulb on the landing. And now Manbre heard it too, over and above the pounding of his own blood—the narrow thread of breath that rose and died, hovering almost beyond the range of sound.

Rosewarne shifted his weight and a floorboard creaked. Instantly the sound broke off; to resume almost a full minute later with the gasp a swimmer makes on breaking surface.

"The window," Manbre whispered.

Rosewarne released his grip and walked to the attic casement. The twin leaves gave at a gentle touch, and a damp breeze swept in. Both men gazed downwards at the fingers that gripped desperately on the sills—fingers dead white with the strain of the weight which they alone supported.

Rosewarne leaned out and said briskly, "All right, you can shin back inside now."

A thin voice rose agonisingly. "I'm done. I can't hang on much longer."

Rosewarne shouted to the rest of the party below to come up with a rope, then he and Manbre reached down and grasped the man round the wrists. The sergeant called out, "All right, we've got you—they're bringing a sling to hoist you in."

They saw the head wag a slow denial, then the fingers began to slide off the edge of the sill. Manbre and Rosewarne tightened their grip but felt the wrists moving through their hands. Nothing could arrest the slow progression, though both men braced their knees inside the window embrasure and tugged with maniac strength. The fingers went from the sill, and for a second, perhaps two, they held that dead weight by the sliding wrists.

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Then the body fell away from them with a rush of air, arcing now and moving outwards from the wall.

Manbre felt the bile rise into his mouth, and drew quickly back inside the room before the final sickening sound. Then he and Rosewarne raced for the stairhead and thumped down floor by floor, down into the crowded passage below and out again into the rain and darkness of the central well. Not so dark now because a police surgeon was at work in one corner beneath the glare of a portable floodlight, bending over a man's body.

He rose and handed a hypodermic to an assistant as Rosewarne came up. " Nasty business, Ted. It's no use, I'm afraid."

" He's alive? " Rosewarne said incredulously.

" Mm—not for long, I'd say. If you want to talk to him, you'd better do it quickly. He's not feeling anything, by the way: I gave him a shot."

The sound of the thin, striving voice came to them.

Rosewarne knelt in the rain on the wet cobbles beside Lucas Valerian and put his head close for the words that came slowly from the blue-white lips. " Nobody is going to hang, copper, not for Lucy Stowe, nor for Paterson. He didn't kill her, did you guess that? "

Rosewarne shook his head. The movement of a shadow made him glance up, and he saw that Crispin Monk was standing beside the surgeon, his arm supporting the bewildered, tragically lovely Venetia. The surgeon leaned forward and wiped the lips of the dying man.

Valerian lay silent, gathering strength, then went on, " Lucy knew too much. Paterson too. You've never seen him in drink." He began labouring for breath. " Man, he was wild—Lucy was scared. I told her, I told her—" the voice faltered and died again.

Rosewarne leaned closer, urging him. " What did you tell her? "

" I said Jimmy was threatening me. I said if she'd make up to him, it would be better for me."

" So Lucy went with Jimmy. How long? "

Again the faint smile. " Not long enough, copper; what she was expecting was mine."

" And you didn't want it? "

" I didn't care. I just wanted to be shot of the judy, with her threats about shopping me."

Rosewarne stiffened. " Shopping you for what? "

Valerian's eyes flickered, then steadied in a staring fixity. " I'd got her passing dope for me. She was a natural; a milk-

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and-roses judy like that, who'd connect?" His breath began to rasp and his voice slurred the next few words. "Stuff began to go missing, I guessed she was on it herself, so I cut off the supply."

"That would make her talk?"

"You know how it goes, copper. I had to get rid of her." He paused again and his breath grew shallow.

Rosewarne urged him on. "Paterson kept a gun in his room."

Valerian stirred under the blankets, his voice was much weaker now. "Jimmy never remembered anything when he sobered up. He'd half kill a man one night, then try to buy him drinks next day. The night Lucy died, he was raving. I'd told him about the kid, but not about me. He just thought she'd been playing around. I sent him off home. Then I took the gun. Lucy had a date with him, but I kept it. She was late. I waited an hour."

The voice cut off, and Valerian lay still with his eyes closed. The surgeon leaned across Rosewarne and held the man's pulse.

The eyes flickered open again, the voice strengthened. "I walked up behind her and put in a bullet."

"You ditched the gun in the cellar?"

Valerian's lips twitched. "That was the best touch. If they'd found it, Paterson would never have talked himself out of it. His prints were all over the gun."

"You wore gloves."

The dying eyes were sly. "Be your age, copper—wouldn't you?"

"What then?"

"You could guess the rest. When Paterson sobered up and read about the killing, it didn't take me long to persuade him that he'd done it in a drunken frenzy. He sweated blood over that gun, but he never found it; no more did that fool Burden. I was safe either way."

"You've lived off him ever since, Valerian."

"I'm dying now because of him and because of you. When that kid found the gun, Paterson got scared and came round to me. He was tanked up; that's how I came by the black eye."

"And tonight?"

Valerian's eyes opened very wide, but a film was creeping over them. "I'd put on the pressure. I needed money to get out. I'd fooled Paterson and Burden both, but I didn't kid myself I could hold you off much longer. Paterson couldn't raise the money; he said he had robbed his wife, but I didn't believe him. He turned nasty, went for my throat—I got the gun out of the desk drawer and let him have it." The voice failed abruptly, and the surgeon laid his ear close to Valerian's chest.

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There was a sudden movement in the group round the dying man, a whispered word, then a young priest carrying a black bag knelt beside the swathed figure. Rosewarne moved a little way back. The words of absolution rose above the shuffle of feet, the hiss of rain on the floodlamp, the murmured conversation of police inside the house. " Ego te absolvo ab omnibus peccatis tuis."

Rosewarne stood silently, feeling the chill rain soak through to his shoulders and back. His head ached, and a deep weariness settled into his bones. The police surgeon detached himself from the group and came over. " He's gone, Ted. We'll have him out of here in a moment."

The Superintendent nodded and joined Manbre inside the house.

" Valerian was all packed up, ready to go," Manbre told him. " Pretty much an allrounder by the look of it. Same lark as St-Germain-des-Prés. Vice, hemp, and blackmail."

Rosewarne said tightly, " I think I have heard all I want to hear about the late Lucas Valerian, so we'll save it for the record, Jack. At the moment, I'm thinking about the other two."

" Miss Tamlin and Mr. Monk? They went off about ten minutes ago."

Rosewarne gave a short laugh and shook his head. " Not them, but two people I have never met: Mr. and Mrs. Stowe. Life owes them a debt that will never be honoured, but I think they owe you a small one themselves."

Manbre said warily, " To me, sir? "

" That's right. I'm chalking this case up to you, Jack. You were the one who wondered about Valerian."

The sergeant shook his head slowly. " I was boxing clouds, sir, and I never had a hope. It was too wild a coil to follow."

" But it got you there in the end." Rosewarne stood quietly filling and lighting his pipe, then added bitterly, " For what it's worth, Jack, we solved Burden's case for him. Let's hope he's enjoying his retirement; he earned it like the rest of us do—the hard way." He stopped, then caught Manbre's eye and grinned suddenly. " Don't worry, Sergeant, the old man's not cracking up, just a little sour. Let's go home while we can."

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PLUGGING IT!

Broadcast five times over the public-address system at a railway terminus, with increasing volume: "Will the person who has lost a hearing aid please apply at the Station Master's Office."

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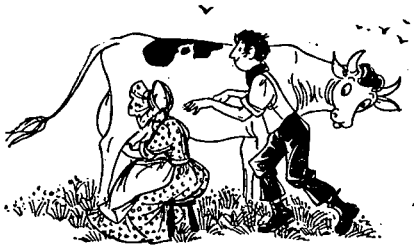

Date with a Dairymaid

I'm going a-milking, sir, she said.

Butter Wouldn't Melt . . .

Edward Follesmark studied Araminta carefully, pretending to inspect the dairy all the time. He had, for some reason, expected a different creature, small, more lusciously curved, fair-haired and pink-cheeked. There was nothing immediately alluring about this thin brown girl, and he thought, with a certain reassurance, that at least Francis hadn't fallen prey to the lust of the eye. And yet . . . there was something, not the voluptuous cuddlesomeness which he had expected and distrusted, but something warm and vivid and vital. By Jove, he thought, I believe the boy was right. Forty years ago I'd . . . nonsense, rubbish, balderdash! All the same there's something even about the way she stands.

"I hope they're treating you properly," he said.

"I'm having a lovely time, sir. It's like a holiday."

"I'm glad of that. Well, Araminta, as you already know, I believe, Mr. Loveless here is interested in dairying, so you won't mind if he comes in now and then and watches you work."

"Not at all, sir. It'll be a great pleasure, sir."

NORAH LOFTS, *To See a Fine Lady*

Separator

Shame upon you, Robin,
Shame upon you now!
Kiss me would you? with my hands
Milking the cow?
Daisies grow again,
Kingcups blow again,
And you came and kiss'd me milking the cow.

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Robin came behind me,
Kissed me well, I vow;
Cuff him could I? with my hands
Milking the cow?
Swallows fly again,
Cuckoos cry again,
And you came and kiss'd me
milking the cow.

Come, Robin, Robin,
Come and kiss me now;
Help it can I? with my hands
Milking the cow?
Ringdoves coo again,
All things woo again,
Come behind and kiss me
milking the cow!

ALFRED TENNYSON, *Queen Mary*

Milky Way

All of a sudden the light rain stopped and the moon came out of her cloud. And Martin found himself standing beside the well-house, and nobody near him. He gazed all around at the familiar things, the apple-trees, the swing, the green wicket, the broken feast in the grass. And then at the far end of the orchard he saw an unfamiliar thing. It was a double ladder arched over the hawthorn. And up the ladder, like a golden shaft of the moon, went six quick girls, and ahead of each her lad. And on the top-most rung each took his milkmaid by the hand and vanished over the hedge . . .

You milkmaids in the hedgerows,
Get up and milk your kine!
The satin lords and ladies
Are all dressed up so fine,
But if you do not skim and churn
How can they dine?
Get up, you idle milkmaids,
And call in your kine.

ELEANOR FARJEON, *Martin Pippin in the Apple-Orchard*

Stinging Retort

With no provocation at all, because the stinging flies were on me, she lifted a hind foot and kicked the bucket of milk into my lap. I looked at her bag. It still seemed as full as ever. I went back to the milking. Humanitarian motives had left me, but I did not want a good milch cow to swell up and die. I got another pint, and Laura lifted a hind leg and kicked me square in the middle. There was only one thing left to do. I kicked her in the middle . . . MARJORIE KINNAN RAWLINGS, *Cross Creek*

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Dairy Box

So evening after evening, she slipped across the Little Lindens, took her stool from the fern-clump beside the fallen oak, and went to work, her pail between her knees, and her head pressed hard into the cow's flank. As often as not, Mrs. Vincey would be milking cross Pansy at the other end of the pasture, and would not come near till it was time to strain and pour off.

Once, in the middle of milking, Kitty Shorthorn boxed Una's ear with her tail.

"You old pig!" said Una, nearly crying, for a cow's tail can hurt.

"Why didn't you tie it down, child?" said a voice behind her.

"I meant to, but the flies are so bad I let her off—and this is what she's done!"

RUDYARD KIPLING, *Marklake Witches*

Romantic Memory

She was pale as a lily
And red as a rose:
And her hair was as black
As the wings of the crows.

The morning had spangled
The cobwebs of silk:
And there gleamed on her fingers
The pearls of the milk.

My pony impatiently
Bore me away;
But I carried her with me
All the bright day.

BRYAN GUINNESS,
The Pretty Girl Milking the Cows

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Letter too the Editor

Dear Sir,

I know as yours is just a book for telling storys but I think as how all the folks what likes to read it must be interrested in all this talk about giving grants of money too young Writers too help them too live till they can sell enough books too keep there selfs which is what I have been reading about in the papers.

Wether they ought too I mean.

Well I have a friend that all ways wanted too be a Writer wright since when he was a little lad.

When we was at school he got in real trouble because he rote so good in composition they didunt believe as that he had done it all hisself, and they used too have him hout in front and try and make him tell as how he had been helped. And he never would because he hadunt and thats what is Dad told them when he come up in a taring rage one morning. Because he wasunt going to have nobody making out as is lad was a liar.

Well. My friend. *I had better not put his real name* because he is the one as once lent me your magazine which is why I thought of writing too you about it *only if I put is name he will know its him* and he might not like it.

So I will call him George because he isunt like George at all and then he wont guess. Well this George as I am telling you about all ways wanted too be a Writer and he won all sorts of prizes and such but they didunt have no scolor ships for Writing in them days. Leastways not round our road.

When it got too schooleaving time his dad said " What you want too go in fer Son."
and He said, " *just Writing* "
and is Dad said, "Thats enough a that youv your living too earn," and prentissed him too the engineering.

Well George knows its no good going agenst is dad. Him being heavyhanded. So he reckoned as how hed just have too do Writing in his spare time and so he signed on for a extra go at that at night school besidsing the three as he as too do for the engineering.

But what with work and night school and growing fast *he never had no life left over for Writing with* and he had to let it go

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till things got easeir. Only it seems as theres a great lot too learn about in this engineering. Very interresting an all, George said it was, mostly.

He got on quite all right with it him being a one as is handy all round. He had too pass a lot of exsams and after that they made him out to be what they called a Civil Engineer which is a thing as as ad a lot of silly jokes made up about it and George says is only what you have to get to be so as to be let go making bridges all over.

His Mam and dad wer fair pleased with him and he all ways used to come and stay with them most times between going all round the world on his jobs. Bought there old house for them and set them up proper with a bath and everything. Saw them comfortable like a good son should but thats all. Nothing la-di-da. No he never had a bit a side Goerge dint. Never put it on. He come down for his pint in the Admiral every night when he was home, just like all ways. " Writing " he says when I ast him, " never have time for that. Maybe someday, someday." *and he looked wistfull in his glass.* He used to tell me,confidential like over our pints, how down right unlucky he had been in a way. All those years as there was when he saw one after the other of his mates being laid off,pretty well every body,including me,was on the dole at least some of the time.And poor George never got a look in. It proper riled him he said,the way all them other blokes was mooning about,didunt know how to fill there time up wi being out of work, and theres him as could have filled is up twice over and never even had a short week.

He even tried too get the sack with keep asking for more wages. And he didunt get sacked. They kept on giving him more wages, till he was fair ashamed to be earning so much when everybody else was on short commons.

It was after that they started sending him to Africa and such like places. Well then the war started,and of course George had to be in it same as the rest on us. Only it didunt make very much difference for him excepting as he had to have on some uniform and be saluted instead of just saying How yer Tom or whatever his name was. And he said as there was a few more folks than usual shootin at them when they was working.Also they made him have a batman as was always wanting to clean the mud off his boots and brush his trowsers so he was just as pleased when it finished.

We dont see as much of George now, because his old man and his Ma being gone he dont keep the house on any longer. But when he does come this road he all ways calls in on me and the missis, and then him and me goes round to the old pub like we used too.

I all ways writes him letters back for what he writes me but I am not as good at it. But he says as how he gets a lot more enjoyment from out what I writes than as I have any idea of. So may be I am not as bad as all that but it is very hard too do and I have to keep on stopping and finding out the wrong spellings with my

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little dictionaray which takes a lot of time up because they do not all ways spell like what you think.Then theres all sorts of little words as as hs stuck on at the fronts and *i* before *e* exceptings sometimes which is all things which you as too try too remember about all of the while you are doing it. The Grammer is most easiest, you just has too put a extra lot of words in so nobody cant not understand. But I would rather have my job for regular.

George has bought hisself a lovely big house in the country where it is all quiet. Hes had it done up regardless so as when he retires from that there engineering he can settle down nice and have a real go at his Writing. *Just like he all ways wanted.* I shall have to mind not too call him George too his self because I have got so used too it now as I keep on thinking as its is name.

I like a good read my self and I go too the libray regular my wife says I should live there, and I think as all these peple what Writes books are so clever as they should be helped out. What made me think of it specilly to day is as I went and looked at the big book selling shop in our town where there is a sale on. And when I was walking all round about and I saw them piles and piles of books with there tickets on—18/6 marked down too 4/- and £2/5/- slashed too 10/- which just shows you *what lots of money them as Writes books must make when there isunt no sales*, well I thought about my old freind and scoolmate as I have been calling by George and how proud he would be and how proud I would be for him if just a one of all them books was hissen. And I think as if young Writers like George could have been started off straight out of school with enough too keep them and there Fathers persuaded, too let them be Writers insted of wasting all there time engineering there would be a lot more books.

Well I must leave you now and hoping as I have not took up too much of your room but I thought like I sayed as how all them as reads it ought too know about it. I do not want too put my name in case of my friend should see so I will sighn my self with the name as that a lady did in the times News Paper as I was looking at in the libray once. Because I am sure as it is equal as good of me as she and so I hope as the lady will not mind if I put that what she put

remain etc.,

A TRUE LOVER OF LITERATURE

I write many letters, but letters, alas, of the most unlettered kind! . . .

There is nothing to write about, you say. Well, then, write and let me know just this—that there is nothing to write about.

PLINY THE YOUNGER, *Epistles*

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LOVE and PESETAS

THE yacht came into the bay of Sa Fosca with that charming air of knowing its own elegance common to large sailing-ships. Work stopped in the village, hands were stilled, heads turned.

She was a motor-ketch called the *Sofia Graciosa*, nearly a hundred and twenty feet long, and painted dark blue and white with pale blue sails. Her designer had evidently been that rare combination of both forward- and backward-looking man, for she was unmistakably modern and as new and shining as a pin, yet she had a poop, a clipper bow, a gilded figurehead in the form of a heraldic dolphin, and here and there touches of gilded carving which made her atmospheric and beguiling, like a beautiful modern actress in eighteenth-century costume. With her poop and the swagger of her bows, she was evocative of the lordly days of sailing-ships; she was magical, like a talisman.

From the Bar Pescador, more of a smugglers' cave than a building, Amadeu Bousquets had his first sight of her, caught his breath, slapped himself on the cheek and grabbed a pair of battered German fieldglasses.

" Madre mia! " he said fervently, after a minute of concentrated scrutiny. " God keep the sea calm and the wind where it is for a day or two." The bay of Sa Fosca was not well protected in south-easterly weather, and for that reason visiting yachts, especially large and splendid visiting yachts, were rarities.

For some moments Amadeu lived on tenterhooks in case the *Sofia Graciosa* should turn out to be coming in simply for a look round, like an exploring child. But she was not. Her decks were all at once alive with crew—Amadeu counted eight and then was unsure whether he had not counted some twice—her steadying sails came down, she went about, stopped engines, and let go her anchor.

Presently a middle-aged man, barrel-chested and going bald, with expensive clothes and rings on his fingers, came out of the deck-house amidships and climbed up on to the poop deck. He leaned against the boom and stared, through high-power glasses, at Sa Fosca. Amadeu Bousquets put him down as the owner, for there was a proprietorial air about him and he looked at Sa Fosca as if he were wondering whether to buy it. After three or four minutes he was joined by a girl.

Amadeu stiffened into the stillness of a setter dog with a whiff of rabbit in its nostrils. He shouted, " Isidro! "

When the boy came he said, " Run, Isidro," in a voice filled

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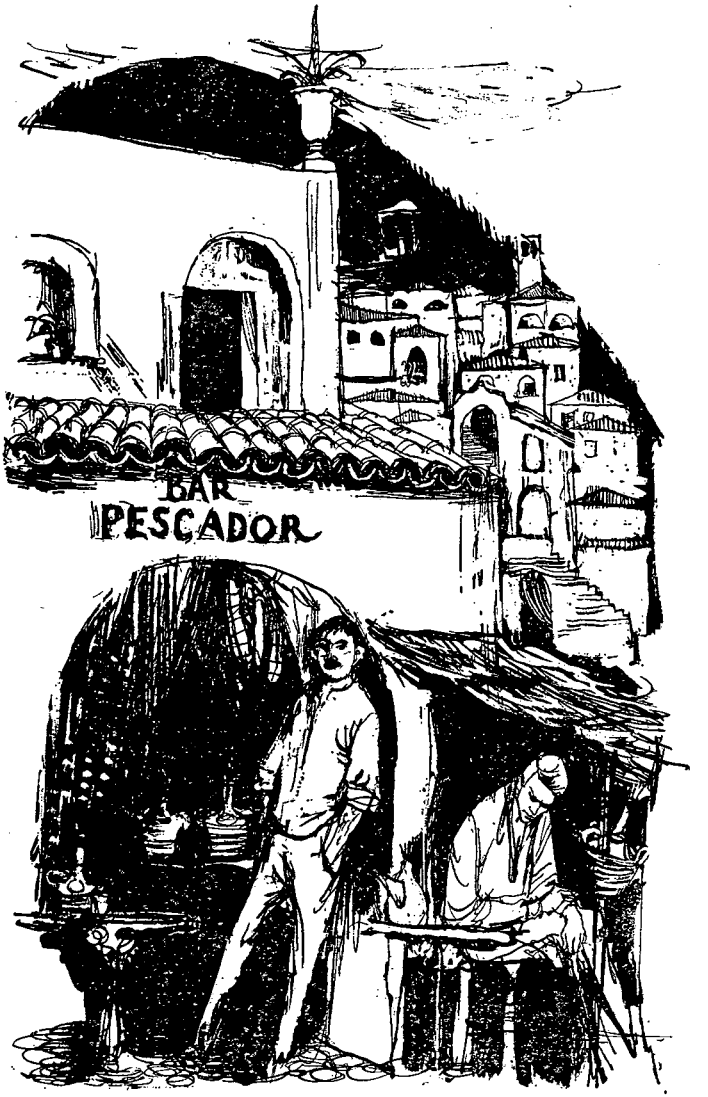

BY KEM BENNETT

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with glad excitement. "Run quickly to fetch Senor Martin. Tell him the goddess of love has come to Sa Fosca. Say that she has come in a boat that is a veritable dream of beauty and excellence. Say that Amadeu who is well accustomed to the beauty of women gives to this one the grand prize of honour with a supplementary gold medal. Run, boy. Hurry! De prisa!"

Isidro reached Martin Asher's villa in less than a couple of minutes, for Sa Fosca was no metropolis. He ran through the garden, observed that Martin's housekeeper was cleaning in the living-room and, disinclined to explain his errand to Asunçion who had the narrow mind of the female and elderly, bore left-handed round the house to the patio at the back. There he paused for an instant to run his hand over the curves of Martin's Gran Turismo Lancia, a possession which deified its owner in his eyes, before crossing the patio to the small window of the study, den, or writing-room. This was a small bare room having no view at all which had been chosen for that very reason because Martin, like most writers, found that any sort of view could distract him with terrible ease from the process of composition.

The room contained only two pieces of furniture, an ultra-modern desk and a matching chair of the delightful kind that both revolves and can be tipped backwards against the pressure of strong springs. Nothing else. It was a cell; it testified to the monastic element of literary endeavour.

In it Martin wrote secret service thrillers which, not very monastically, had sex and violence as their dominant constituents. They were unfailing best-sellers, which accounted for the Lancia and the villa. They all had as hero a character called Max Blant, invulnerable, irrepressible, sexually irresistible. For Martin his relationship with Max had passed the honeymoon period and reached the point where he was tied to the man not by love but by gold and the dictatorship of the proletariat. He wrote about him, therefore, not with joy and delight but with feelings that were often not far removed from nausea.

When Isidro tapped on the window, Martin stopped typing, looked up, frowned, and said, "Well?"

Isidro, fourteen years old, last of the many sons of Amadeu and sophisticated, grinned; he knew that behind the severity a little hymn of thanksgiving was singing in Senor Martin's head—thanks for deliverance, thanks for the excuse, any excuse, to leave typewriter, den, and villa and walk in the sunshine to the Bar Pescador.

"There is a yacht, senor," Isidro said breathlessly. "It has just arrived. Very beautiful, very rich, riquissimo, oh yes! And there is a girl aboard. My father says she is the queen of love. It may well be so, although I have not seen her."

Martin reproved him. "Can't you see I'm busy, Isidro?"

Isidro nodded. "Yes," he said. "I will tell my father you are coming. Hasta pronto, senor."

At one end of the beach there was the Bar Pescador, a cool, shadowed cavern of a place, spicy-smelling, racked with bottles

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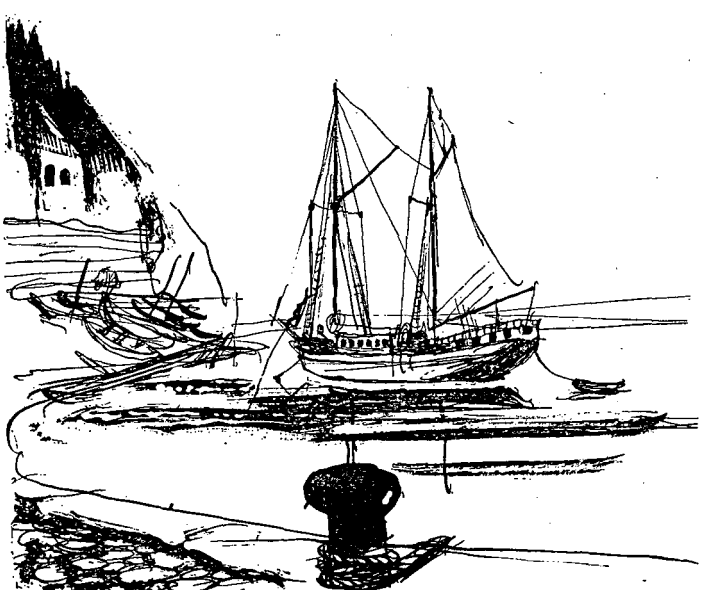
and hung with vintage sausages. At the other end, no more than two hundred yards or so away, there stood the Hotel Fosca, owned by Maria Robledo, neither very good nor very bad as tourist hotels go; it had plenty of newly-fitted bathrooms but never enough hot water, and an American Bar with concealed lighting, bullfight pictures, and too much wrought iron. But its major drawback was its proprietress, a woman with a moustache like a cavalry corporal and badly-fitting false teeth, who was also Amadeu's most implacable enemy. Between the Bar Pescador and the hotel the waterfront was filled by a score of fishermen's cottages and a small general shop, and that, apart from five or six villas built into the hillside behind the village, was all that there was of Sa Fosca.

But if it was small and humble, it was also beautiful in the Mediterranean light, with pine-green hills leaping dramatically upwards into the sky and the *Sofia Graciosa* riding at anchor in the tranquil sapphire waters of the perfectly hemispherical bay.

Outside the Bar Pescador, at a table set under a rude awning made of fresh-cut pine branches, Martin Asher poured himself a second glass of Amadeu's vino rosado and took a cooling pull at it, stretching out his long bare legs so that they protruded from the shadow of the awning into the sunlight. He was feeling fine.

There was little reason for him not to be feeling fine, in fact, since he was a healthy male of thirty-five, not at all repulsive to look at, making a handsome income with less effort and loss of



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liberty than ninety-nine per cent of the world's population, with his appetites and perceptions in excellent order, and without that leaning towards introspective self-diminishment which takes the gilt off the gingerbread for so many otherwise happy writers.

Presently, movement aboard the *Sofia Graciosa* caused him to put down his wine and raise the binoculars. He was conscious that Amadeu beside him was impatient for a turn with what were, after all, his glasses, but he hardened his heart. The old pirate had had one look at the goddess already, if goddess she was, whereas so far he, Martin, had seen only two crew members joylessly engaged in getting an outboard launch into the water.

Now things seemed to be moving. First of all the man whom Amadeu had placed as the owner came up from below and took his place in the launch. He looked, Martin thought, like an Italian-American gangster—which meant, almost surely, that he would turn out to be the blameless president of some mercantile bank or other. Half a minute or so later the girl appeared.

Martin stared, frowned, lowered the glasses, adjusted the focus, and raised them again to his eyes.

She was wearing yellow-and-black toreador pants which clung to her long legs with handmade faultlessness, and a swaggering black shirt of spectacular simplicity. She carried, but to Martin's satisfaction was not wearing, sunglasses. She had on one arm an outsize black straw handbag which was the apotheosis of outrageous Italian chic.

Martin turned to Amadeu and pulled a face of surprised approval. Amadeu, grinning from ear to ear, bounced up and down in his chair like a chimpanzee with a bath bun; for the moment he was Pan, he was the goat god.

Martin looked at the girl again. He saw a reposeful, full-lipped mouth, slumbering dark eyes which promised, at a moment of awakening, to contradict the repose of the mouth, a straight and elegant nose, and a commanding but shapely chin, all of this burnt agreeably brown by the sun, framed by short, curling raven hair and set upon a slender, columnar neck. Like the Japanese, Martin attached importance to necks, knowing that they were the source of some of the subtler radiations of physical attractiveness. He felt he could only bestow approval upon this one.

Amadeu could restrain himself no longer. "Well?" he said explosively. "Did I not speak the truth? Is she not a paragon? Observe the face—that repose, that promise of passion and readiness for laughter! Consider the body—such generosity and yet such restraint! And in movement one would say a tigress! Ah, Senor Martin, many women are passionate, as you well know; some are both beautiful and passionate, but how many are beautiful, passionate, and can laugh—laugh in a way that does not remind one of the twittering of little birds? Ay, caramba, what a combination—such a boat and such a woman!" Words appeared to fail him and he reached for the bottle of vino rosado.

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" You are quite right, Amadeu," Martin said. " I don't remember having seen anything better looking in a month of Sundays. It remains to be seen whether she has a nice nature."

Amadeu's mouth fell open and his hand, holding his wineglass, was stilled halfway between the table and his lips. " All this," he said incredulously, " and you ask for a nice nature as well! "

" One cannot help being a perfectionist."

Amadeu stared at him and drank some wine. " Yes," he said, " I understand. We have a different approach, you and I. I am grateful for small mercies and devoutly obliged for large ones, whereas you, Senor Martin, you have imagination! . . . Ah well . . . Tell me, do you think they will come here? "

" They may," Martin said, " but you must not be disappointed if they go to Maria Robledo's; people of that kind, Amadeu, the very rich, are generally not adventurous. They tend to go where they think they will feel most at home."

Amadeu chuckled evilly. " After one taste of the Robledo's cooking and ten minutes in the ultimate boredom of that trap for the unperceiving, they will not be feeling at home," he observed happily. " It is then that they will come to Amadeu. Eh, Senor Martin? Then they will *have* to come to Amadeu. Where else, after all? "

" They may," Martin agreed. " Or they may go back aboard that floating palace of theirs and sail away to S'Agaro or Barcelona."

It was evident that the possibility had not occurred to Amadeu. He let out a little moan of dismay. " Ah, no! " he whispered. " Madre mia, let it not happen. They *must* come to the Bar Pescador; if they do not, my life will be flawed and meaningless. It is not the money, Senor Martin, although that is, of course, always welcome; it is simply that I wish this paragon to frequent my bar. It is not often in Sa Fosca that we have such visitations and I wish to be able to say to my friends and clients, ' Ah, por dios, had you only been here last year! ' "

Martin said, " Look, they're leaving."

They watched the launch cover the hundred yards of water between the *Sofia Graciosa* and the shore in a seething curve of acceleration. Straight to the quay below the Hotel Fosca it went, and while tourists gawped, the man and the girl disembarked and crossed the quay to the open doors of the hotel and the open arms of Maria Robledo.

Amadeu's face went sour with disappointment and he spat lugubriously into the sand at his feet. " Witless! " he said bitterly. " It must, of course, have been the choice of the man, not the girl."

Martin drank down his wine and rose to his feet. Amadeu was a great friend; it was time to do him a good turn. " Because I love you, Amadeu," he said, " and don't like to see you in pain, I will go and try to lure them into your bar. I'll devise some way of whispering the facts of life at Sa Fosca in their ears. I'll even eat at Maria Robledo's to give myself the opportunity—and that,

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as you know, is paying a price. Would you like to send Isidro to tell Asunçion that I shall not be in for lunch?"

"Willingly," Amadeu said with a catch in his voice. "Thank you. Muchissimas gracias, Senor Martin, you are a true friend."

Martin arrived at the Hotel Fosca just in time to see the pair from the *Sofia Graciosa* move from the American Bar into the dining-room. They were talking in Italian with a volubility which made them incomprehensible to Martin, whose Italian was meagre, but which did not disguise the undertones of discord in the conversation.

He lied to Senora Robledo about his reasons for patronising her badly-reputed restaurant and was not believed but did not care. Then, by being woodenly stupid and wilfully single-minded, he managed, contrary to Maria Robledo's intentions, to manœuvre himself to a table only two removed from the one at which the pair from the *Sofia Graciosa* had been seated.

Their discussion, he noted as he sat down, had become warmer. With the air of being entirely concerned with his own business, Martin ate his hors d'œuvres and watched them. At close quarters, he was obliged to admit, the girl from the *Sofia Graciosa* fulfilled her long-distance promises; she was as physically beautiful as his eyes had led him to expect and, as well, she was quite evidently thoroughly spirited and mettlesome—a little too much, perhaps.

A few minutes earlier, when he had watched her standing on the deck of the yacht, arms akimbo and face turned up to the sun, he had come closest to understanding what was going on in the mind of Amadeu; it had been easy, then, and tempting, to observe one-sidedly and see divine splendour in what was, after all, no more than youth, beauty, and joie de vivre. It was always easy, was it not? Had he not, he asked himself sagely, made that very mistake with Phoebe, Mary, Vivian (whom he had married but was now divorced from), Pat, Pilar, Marie-Louise? He thought of them all, and others, now, with affection, but with none of Amadeu's romantic adulation; he had learnt, for heaven's sake, in thirty-five years, to observe many-sidedly, and to know that women were always women and never, never goddesses.

The conversation at the nearby table had deteriorated, meanwhile, into nothing less than a fine old Italian row. The girl was spectacular in her anger, eyes flashing, bosom heaving, white teeth biting off and spitting out words as if they were pieces of very crisp apple. Accusations were being hurled backwards and forwards across the table, and it needed no knowledge of Italian to understand that they were quickly degenerating into plain insult.

From time to time the man, wearing a dove-grey silk shirt, buttoned at the neck but without a tie, and immaculate cream-coloured trousers held round his waist by an expensive lizard-skin belt, broke the sequence of accusation and counter-accusation by turning his eyes upwards and calling upon God in a loud voice

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for tolerance, patience, and fortitude. Also from time to time, when one of his companion's remarks had stung, evidently, like a scorpion's tail, he made splendid clawing gestures in front of his empurpled face, the rings on his fingers glinting opulently as he did so.

Martin continued to watch and listen while his jaw muscles fought a losing battle with the elderly goat cutlet which was Maria Robledo's specialité de la maison. Oh, Amadeu, he thought as the girl's imprecations filled the air, this is no paragon, old friend, only a bad-tempered, not to say bad-mannered, young woman.

The noise of the altercation became embarrassing, and Maria Robledo came bustling up to the strangers' table to remonstrate. She was ignored. She bustled away again, her moustache stretched over a sickly smile as she made gestures of apology and reassurance to her other clients. Prune-faced, an English family folded their napkins and left the room, tut-tutting to one another with pointed audibility.

The row continued. It soared up and up until, with that inevitability which transforms mere plot or pattern into drama, crescendo and climax were reached. At one moment the air was filled with imprecation and outrage, and at the next there was silence. The girl had thrown her wine into her companion's face.

The man rose to his feet, eyes glaring, wine dripping down his chest. He leaned swiftly forward and his hand whipped across the table. The girl's head jerked sideways with the power of the slap, which made an embarrassingly loud noise in the silence, but she did not otherwise move—simply sat, one cheek scarlet, eyes dark and furious with disdain.

Martin laid down his knife and fork.

A surge of feeling rose up, banners flying, from the depths of his subconscious, inhibiting all mental processes, smothering prudence, scorning convention. In a split second it had reached critical mass, detonated, and blown him to his feet. He took two paces away from his table and without pausing in his stride hit the stranger hard about three inches above his lizard-skin belt. It was a wickedly effective punch, especially on top of a bellyful of Maria Robledo's goat. It doubled the man up like a safetypin and sent him reeling backwards into the table behind him, blessedly unoccupied. The noise of smashing crockery filled the air, quickly followed by the ululations of outraged female tourists.

The owner of the *Sofia Graciosa* lay where he had fallen, nerves of the solar plexus paralysed, a jumbled heap of temporary non-existence, spilt mayonnaise dripping solemnly on to his upturned face. Martin stared down at him with a feeling of great triumph and some surprise, because he knew from experience that strong men are rarely knocked out by a single blow—except with gloves in the boxing-ring.

"Well," a voice said from behind his shoulder, in English. "Poor Carlo! That was the last thing he was expecting."

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Martin turned. The girl had left the table and was standing beside him, looking down at the fallen. She was no longer angry, nor did she seem either triumphant or vindictively pleased.

"I hope I haven't hurt him," Martin said, and then, looking down, realised that it was, perhaps, an odd thing to say.

The girl chuckled. "Oh, I'm sure you haven't," she said reassuringly. "He is very strong and made completely of rubber." The remark did not seem callous, only informative. "All the same," she went on, "I think it would be better to go before he wakes up. He is very violent when he is out of temper, and it would be prudent."

"But—but we can't just leave him there!" Martin's moment of exaltation had passed and he was becoming aware that he had assaulted a man who owned the best part of a hundred thousand pounds' worth of yacht. It was not so much that he was afraid, but that he saw complications and inconveniences arising; they were in Spain, where wealth commanded greater official respect, perhaps, than in the more egalitarian countries.

"Of course we can leave him if we want to," the girl said practically. "Any help that he needs he will receive more graciously from others than from us, I can tell you. Please do not think that I am asking you to run away, I just think it would be best to go."

Her logic was unassailable. Martin struggled for a brief moment with an attack of public school conventionality and then surrendered. "All right, if you think it would be best . . ."

They turned and walked together towards the entrance, shocked eyes, frog-like with disapproval, following them as they went. Maria Robledo intercepted them, shouting at the top of her voice about disturbances, broken crockery, the good name of her hotel, and other unimportant matters. The girl smiled at her graciously. Martin, infected by the girl's insouciance, put his finger to his lips and walked past her. As a crony of Amadeu's, he was already inscribed in Maria Robledo's book as profligate and worthless; this would merely confirm her preconceptions and, he found, he was not in the mood to mind.

Outside the hotel a cadaverous member of the *Sofia Graciosa*'s crew was sitting on a sardine box on the quay, smoking a two-peseta cigar and keeping Sa Fosca's small boys off the yacht's launch. The girl shouted at him. He looked up. "Go into the hotel and find Signor Carlo," she instructed. "He is in need of a little assistance." She turned to Martin. "Where now?"

Martin hesitated. The obvious answer was the Bar Pescador—and one that would bring sunshine into the life of Amadeu. The Bar Pescador, however, was very public and open to invasion by outraged Italian millionaires. He said, "Well, there's my house . ."

She seemed enchanted. "Why not?" she said gaily, then added, "It is very kind of you. It would be nice to have somewhere to hide for a little while."

With the feeling that fate had him rather by the scruff of the

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neck, Martin said, " Very well. Come on," and set off towards an alleyway between two cottages which led in the direction of his villa.

The living-room of Martin's house was white-walled and tile-floored, a little too long for its width but having in recompense wide windows at either end, giving in one case a comprehensive view of the bay and in the other a pleasantly narrow view of the patio and hillside behind the house. It was furnished with a combination of sombre old Spanish oak, rich red leather, and chairs and settees of the most modern and comfortably functional kind.

The girl from the *Sofia Graciosa* was sitting in one of the chairs, long legs crossed, brilliant as a hunting wasp in her gaudy trousers.

Asunçion came in with the coffee tray. Not being au courant with the situation, and having had the lunch she had cooked rejected twice in a matter of half an hour, she was vexed. She banged down the tray and waddled out of the room in a pet. Martin watched her go ruefully, thinking of the interminable explanations and conversations with which he would have to feed her hurt pride before his household settled down again into its peaceful routine.

The girl started, unasked, to pour out the coffee. Since leaving the hotel they had not referred again to the incident in the restaurant, only exchanged polite remarks about the loveliness of Sa Fosca and the clemency of the spring weather. During this time Martin had been possessed by the feeling, akin to one produced by a certain kind of dream, of being involved in some sort of theatrical performance without having the slightest idea of his part or of what was meant to happen next. It was a feeling that he did not appreciate. He told himself fiercely to stop worrying and to enjoy the company of this most attractive young woman while he had the chance, but it was no use; she, and the circumstances surrounding her, were too abnormal, disruptive, fascinating, disturbing, and provocative to respond to the customary process of pigeon-holing.

She passed him his coffee. He said, " Thank you . . . That was one of the finest rows I have ever been privileged to witness. Do you often do that kind of thing? "

She smiled ruefully. " Only too often," she confessed. " I am afraid I am most wicked. It was all my fault. Last week, you see, I was with friends in Barcelona and I stayed three days longer than was arranged. I told Carlo—"

" Carlo? "

" The man you just hit in the stomach. I told Carlo that I stayed in order to look after Maria Pia who was ill, when in fact I stayed because there was a motor-race in which Maria Pia's brother, Alberto, was driving. This morning Carlo called Maria Pia on the radio-telephone to ask if she was better and she was too absent-minded, the idiot, to remember that I had explained to her that she had been ill."

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" I see," Martin said. Her hands, he noted, were slim and brown and unencumbered with rings.

" At the same time," the girl went on, " Carlo really gets more and more insupportable. He has the temper of the devil and I simply will not put up with it."

" Of course not," Martin said.

" He thinks I am a child and completely irresponsible. Well, I am certainly irresponsible, but I am not a child and it is time that he learnt it. Besides, irresponsibility is one of the pleasures of life and I am not going to be done out of it just to please Carlo. Don't you agree? "

Martin blinked. " Quite," he said. " Yes. Of course. Naturally."

There was a sudden gust of laughter from the girl. " Oh, this is deplorable," she said. " You must forgive me. You defend me with great gallantry and I repay you with long and boring justifications of my own bad behaviour. I think we should introduce ourselves. I am Maddelena Visconti."

" My name is Martin Asher," Martin said.

" And you are English and you live here in this nice house? "

" I live here most of the time," Martin said. " You are Italian, aren't you? "

" Neapolitan, to be exact," the girl said. " The women of Naples have the reputation of being short-tempered and of talking too much; I live up to it."

Martin sat down, bending himself in the middle like a piece of folding furniture because he was more than six feet tall. The sense of having no part to speak was diminishing. " They have the reputation of being extremely beautiful," he said gallantly, " which you also live up to."

Maddelena smiled. It was a ravishing smile which made a huge joke of their situation, accepted his compliment, and also recognised him for the first time as an individual in his own right and not as a kindly stranger to whom politeness was due. Then, suddenly, her hand went to her mouth. " Martin Asher! " she gasped. " You must be the famous novelist."

Ah, Martin thought, here it was; here was the reward, the justification for the long monkish hours in the writing cell. " Yes," he said huskily, " I am a novelist."

" But I have read every one of your books," Maddelena exclaimed. " They are so exciting—and so sexy! Max Blant! Dio mio, what a man—so strong, so wicked, so irresistible. He deals in only two commodities, love and death, and what could be more thrilling? "

" Now you are taking the mickey," Martin complained.

" Taking the mickey? "

" Making fun of me."

" But not at all, I am extremely serious. Max Blant is my hero. Let us not deny it, Martin—may I call you Martin?—such a man is what every woman is secretly looking for—someone who will strike

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down her enemies, throw her on a bed, and never take no for an answer."

Martin poured them both some brandy. " I had never thought of it that way," he said. " I'm not at all sure that I care for Max Blant myself, so I am torn in half by your enthusiasm. I—"

" Ah," Maddelena interrupted, " but that makes it perfect. The one thing that all Max Blants must be is contemptuous of their own powers; without that they tend to be insufferable."

Martin recoiled. " Please," he said, " please don't start thinking of me as Max Blant! "

" No? But look what you just did to Carlo. One superb blow and, pouf, there he is on the floor. And Carlo is no lily! Believe me, he is very strong and tough."

Horror, and the sense of being in a pilotless aeroplane careering towards unknown obstacles, pulled Martin to his feet. " Look," he said, " Miss Visconti, I—I hit Carlo without thinking."

" Maddelena please, if I am to call you Martin," she insisted.

" Maddelena," Martin said, " please understand. In the restaurant I acted on the spur of the moment. I saw him hit you, and before I knew what I was doing—"

" You leapt into action like the champion boxer of Europe," she said with satisfaction. " It was truly splendid. I have been waiting for such a moment all my life. However, I promise not to think of you as Max Blant, if it offends you; I am quite happy to think of you as Martin Asher. There, does that satisfy you? "

" Ye-es, but—"

" No buts, there is nothing more to discuss." She rose to her feet and walked to the window which looked out over the bay of Sa Fosca. Presently she turned. " Now," she said, " there is a decision I must make. It is whether I should go straight back to Carlo and apologise, or whether I should continue to be wicked and irresponsible for a little while longer."

Martin recognised the imminence of a moment of truth. If he suggested that she should go back she might easily agree, and would presently go—back to Carlo, whoever he was, back to the *Sofia Graciosa* and, probably, out of his life. What, he asked himself with a touch of desperation, did he want her to do? There was no easy answer; in fact, there were too many answers. He became acutely aware of the fact that man is legion and that in such a legion it is only too possible for those at the rear to shout " On " and those at the front to shout " Back."

There was a silence. Maddelena had strolled the length of the room and was looking out of the window at the patio. " What a lovely car," she exclaimed. " Alberto—you know, Maria Pia's brother of whom I told you—he has a Ferrari, but this is nicer. It has such elegance. Are you pleased with it? "

" I'm delighted with it," Martin said.

Maddelena came back to stand by the fireplace. She had her arms akimbo. It was a stance that he already recognised as characteristic of her. He liked it; it had none of the aggressiveness

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that commonly accompanied its use by a woman, no touch of the female politician. It seemed to express an intention to take life by the seat of the pants and shake it until all the good bits fell out. It was charming. She was charming. She was ravishing. She was desirable.

Martin grabbed hold of himself. She was also, he remembered, irresponsible, on her own admission, a veritable wildcat in an argument, and mixed up somehow with an Italian millionaire who looked like a gangster.

So what?

He took a deep breath. "I wouldn't dream of stopping you going back to apologise," he said, "only isn't it a little soon? Do you think Carlo will have had time to cool off? Would it not be better to leave it a little longer? We might go for a drive, or something . . ."

Martin turned the car out of the gate. The road beyond was hardly more than a cart-track which, fifty yards farther on, joined the so-called main road that led tortuously up from Sa Fosca to Palafrugell. Halfway along the cart-track, coming towards them, a man was walking. Martin, concentrating on taking the Lancia through the tight turn after the gate, gave him less than a passing glance.

Maddelena was more observant. "Aiee!" she said. "It is Carlo."

"Carlo?" Martin looked down the track and saw that she was right. He had changed his clothes, but the man approaching was, without doubt, Carlo.

"How could he have known where to find us?"

"There are no secrets in Sa Fosca," Martin said grimly. "I suspect he got his information through Maria Robledo; she delights in causing trouble. What do you want to do?"

Maddelena said, "I shall speak to him."

They came alongside the Italian who was waving them down imperiously. His face, set in a mask of suppressed fury, indicated that the cooling off process had hardly started. Italian poured through the open windows of the car in a torrent. "We are going for a drive," Maddelena said loudly in English and quickly wound up her window.

Carlo seized a dead branch from the roadside and started round the car, brandishing it like a club. Martin wound up the window on his side.

Maddelena, with Carlo safely on the far side of the car, wound her window down again and shouted, "I shall come back tonight when you are in a better temper." To Martin she said, "Drive on."

As Martin slipped the car into gear, Carlo brought his pine branch down with a great thump on the roof of the car. Outraged, Martin rammed his foot down. They shot away down the track in a spurt of acceleration and Carlo's stentorian Italian imprecations were blotted out by the resonant burble of the

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Lancia's exhaust. "Do not worry about him," Maddelena said primly, "he does not deserve it. Andiamos! Let us go like the wind to Gerona."

Maddelena had bought a handmade dress in white cotton lace that was the specialised product of a nunnery not far from Gerona. She was wearing it, having said that if they were going sightseeing, particularly to the cathedral, it was more suitable than yellow-and-black pants. She had also bought, in the space of less than half an hour, a large and exotic beach hat, a harpoon gun worked by compressed air, several pieces of fantaisie jewellery, a book on Catalan art, and a short jacket made of antelope skin.

She had paid for these purchases from a roll of notes the size of a steelworker's fist which she had fished up from the depths of her monstrous handbag. The cost of her shopping, which had been considerable, had not appreciably mutilated the roll. Martin, whose upbringing had been moderately parsimonious, found that her projectile manner of spending money had an effect upon him like alcohol.

They had visited the cathedral of Gerona, ancient, vast, and intensely holy. As a contrast to the shopping expedition, Martin had found its solemn peace soothing. He was still a much-divided man.

After leaving the cathedral, standing in the dust of the street with the heat of the late afternoon sun still powerful, Maddelena had expressed a desire for ice-cream. So now they were in a garden restaurant, eating ice-cream and enjoying the shade of embowered roses over their heads.

"Who," Martin asked, "is Carlo?"

"He is a—a businessman, I suppose."

"What do you mean, you suppose?"

Maddelena licked the last of her ice-cream off her spoon with care and laid the spoon down. She put her elbows on the table. She had a faraway look in her eye and she appeared to hesitate. "Well," she said, "during the war, in Naples, Carlo found himself in the black market."

Martin snorted. "Found himself! Don't you mean found his way to?"

"No, found himself," Maddelena insisted. "How was he to be different from the rest of the population? However, it seems that Carlo took to the black market. How do you say?—it turned out to be his forte, his niche in life."

"I can imagine," Martin said. "He looks the part."

Maddelena chuckled. "You must not be rude about Carlo. When he is not in a bad temper he is extremely nice. Anyway, after the war, by which time I believe he was already rich, he found an opening in the cigarette trade—on the distributing side."

"American cigarettes?" Martin queried. "Shipped through Tangier?"

"Precisely. It was, of course, illegal but I believe very profitable.

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After a few years he sold out and since then he has been a businessman. That is all I know. I do not inquire too deeply, for it is no affair of mine how he makes his money and I do not wish to embarrass him."

"Whatever his business is," Martin said, "he appears to thrive in it. The *Sofia Graciosa* is the best-looking boat I've seen since I was last in Monte Carlo."

"Yes, it was very expensive," Maddelena said. "He has another, smaller one that he uses for day trips and weekends."

"What," Martin snarled, "is your—your relationship with this Neapolitan Croesus?"

Maddelena's eyes were wide. "But I am his mistress," she said. "Had you not guessed?"

Martin ground out his cigarette in the ice-cream dish. "Yes," he said. "I suppose I had. Shall we drive on to Tossa? I know a fisherman's fonda there where we could eat well."

"That would be perfect," Maddelena said. "I am greatly enjoying myself."

On the way to Tossa they stopped the car and spent an hour on the hillsides gathering wild asparagus. At the fonda which, like Amadeu's Bar Pescador, made no attempt to move with the times and was consequently thoroughly popular, they ate snails done with tomatoes and garlic, their own wild asparagus, and a dish of stuffed squid in a rich and aromatic sauce having bitter chocolate as one of its ingredients. They also drank quantities of near black wine which tasted of flint and hot iron and was delicious.

Just before midnight they bathed from the Playa de Pola, a beach at that hour deserted lying between Tossa and San Feliu de Guixols.

They reached Sa Fosca shortly before three in the morning. "You have to go back to the boat?" Martin asked as he turned the car into the gate.

"I must, for I have not been very kind to poor Carlo and he will be angry enough as it is that I should have stayed away so long."

"I'll row you out," Martin said. "I have a dinghy down on the beach."

He opened the door of the car and stepped out. A shadow moved from behind the garage doors. It moved quickly and, before Martin had time to register more than the fact of it, an iron-hard fist hit him accurately and powerfully in the solar plexus. The wind went out of him in a sharp wheezing whistle and he felt the absolute, belly-sinking nausea which a blow of the kind induces. As his knees crumpled and a rosy mist of dire agony formed before his staring eyes, he heard scuffling from the far side of the car, shouted orders in Italian, and then Maddelena's voice raised in furious helplessness. "Max," she was shouting. "Max, help me! Help me!"

Blackness swept over him. . .

Martin stirred, groaned, and opened his eyes. His cheek was pressed affectionately against the gravel of his garden path. In

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some curious way he recognised it for his own gravel and was briefly comforted. He took a deep breath and groaned again, putting his heart into it, but nobody seemed to hear, or mind, or show any signs of coming to his assistance. Each time he breathed, his bruised stomach muscles registered fiery protest, so he lay still for a while, cursing Amadeu, Carlo, Maddelena, and Max Blant—especially Max Blant. Presently he staggered to his feet, tottered up the path and let himself into his villa. In the living-room he poured himself a large glass of brandy and swallowed it neat, luxuriating in the ardour of it as it caressed his brutalised stomach.

Feeling a little better and, for the first time, becoming aware of distant noises in the night, he went to the window which looked out across Sa Fosca. The *Sofia Graciosa* still lay at anchor in the bay, her deck-lights burning, an oasis of light and activity in an area that was otherwise as black as pitch. Martin could see the launch tied up at the *Sofia*'s gangway, he could see movement on her broad decks and, distantly, he could hear voices raised in umbrage.

They were at it again. What a life, he thought, argue, argue, argue, morning, noon, and night. He turned disgustedly away from the window, holding his stomach, sat down with deliberate care and poured himself a second brandy.

So, he told himself, that's that. Smite the dragon, succour the princess, turn your back for five minutes, and get it in the neck, or rather guts, from the resurrected dragon. So much for the life of errantry, so much for romance, so much for letting Max Blant get the upper hand.

He stared morosely at the sitting-room door. Beyond it, some thirty paces away, up a short flight of steps and along a landing, there was his bedroom. In his bedroom there was his bed. It would have been lovingly made by Asunçion, with clean white sheets turned down and soft pillows waiting invitingly. He yearned towards it—bed and oblivion, order and comfort, the soft, intangible bonds of the habitual, everything that was anti-dragon, anti-princess, anti-Maddelena.

But something within him said no. He had no patience with it, he hated it, he rejected it, and it still said no. He saw Maddelena buying a white dress, Maddelena eating ice-cream, picking asparagus, guzzling snails, driving the Lancia, swimming in the moonlit phosphorescent water off the Playa de Pola, and knew that she had him bewitched. Because of her, bed would have lost its comfort and oblivion its obliviousness; the habitual had ceased to be restful and had become tedious. His goose, he realised, was cooked.

He stripped off his clothes and fetched a pair of trunks from the bedroom. He put on a towelling dressing-gown and armed himself with a loaded, string-bound cosh that he kept in the house for protection against burglars and tourists. He left the house and padded in rope-soled alpargatas down the rough paths to the beach.

Across the water the *Sofia Graciosa* was quiet now, with no sign

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of life on deck. The deck-lights were out but others were burning aft in the poop, amidships in the deck-house, and forrad in the crew's quarters. As he watched, the ones in the crew's quarters were extinguished. Which light, he wondered, was Maddelena's? He shrugged in the darkness; time would tell. As he slipped off his dressing-gown and waded knee-deep into the calm, tepid water he was reminded of the war—when he had volunteered to drop into occupied territory by parachute. The volunteering, he remembered, had been easy—the announcement of his intention in the adjutant's office, his signature carelessly scribbled under a letter, the joking but admiring comments in the mess—but then had come the moment, the moment when with his parachute on his back he stared down at a strange French terrain brightly illuminated by a full moon. A cool-footed ghost insect skittered down his spine. He caught up the pieces of himself, took a deep breath, and plunged forward into the water, much in the same way as he had thrust himself through the hole in the Liberator's floor on the other occasion.

He climbed silently on to the *Sofia Graciosa*'s deck and stood there dripping. To give himself courage he weighed the cosh in his hand. How hard, he wondered, could one safely hit with it?

Cat-footed, Martin crossed to the windows of the deck-house. Inside was a big saloon, spacious, elegantly furnished, luxuriously appointed—and empty. There would, he guessed from the layout of the ship and her dimensions, be cabins below. Try the poop first, he told himself.

He padded across the deck to the poop. On either side of it companionways with carved rails rose in short graceful spirals to the poop deck. Ahead of him there was a door with light coming through the ventilating panel. He tried to peer through the slats of the ventilation, but the designer had thought of that and he was unsuccessful. However, what he could not see he could smell; through the slats came a waft of scent, elusive, fragrant, evocative—yes, of Maddelena. He tried the door very, very gently. It was locked.

"Maddelena," he whispered.

He heard a sudden movement inside the cabin. He whispered again, "Maddelena!"

Maddelena's voice breathed, "Max! Is it you?"

"No," Martin said in a furious whisper. "It's Martin. For heaven's sake, stop this Max nonsense!"

"I am locked in."

"I know."

"Carlo has the key."

"Where?" Martin asked.

"Here," said a voice behind him. Martin jumped like a frightened dowager and his heart seemed to have absented itself, leaving behind a hollow and lifeless cavity. He half turned, but something hard ground into the small of his back and a voice,

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speaking English with a heavy Italian-American accent, said, "Hands up! Don' give trouble; just stick 'em up."

"Max!" Maddelena's voice cried urgently from inside the cabin. "I mean Martin. Martin, what's happening? Carlo! Carlo, are you there? Let me out! Will you let me *out*!" She broke into furious Italian and started hammering on the cabin door.

"Get moving," Carlo said to Martin. "Keep your hands up, signore. Walk towards the saloon, eh, and don' give trouble or else . . .

"Here," Carlo said, throwing Martin a beach wrap. "Now you can sit down without marking my new chairs."

Martin put on the wrap and sat down. Carlo sat opposite him, gun on the table. It was a .65 mm. Biretta automatic, Martin noted, and the safety-catch was on. He felt a little happier.

"Now," Carlo said harshly, "what you want?"

Martin shrugged. He was not sure that he knew himself. "You brought Maddelena back by force," he said. "In fact, she was about to come back of her own accord—"

"In a pig's eye!"

"Ask her," Martin said furiously. "I tell you she was going to come back. I had just offered to row her out."

"So?"

"I happen to dislike the idea of people being physically bullied, or forced to do things they don't want to do, so I swam out to talk to her—and to help her if she wanted to get away from you."

"That's all?"

"That's all," Martin said virtuously.

Carlo stared at him. The Italian had deep brown eyes filled with a peculiarly Mediterranean sort of wisdom. "Who are you lying to?" he asked politely. "Me, yourself, or both of us?"

Martin did not answer. The bolt, however, struck home.

"You got no ideas?" Carlo was prompting sarcastically. "You were not thinking, maybe, of a little pass? Maddelena, she's jus' like a sister to you, maybe, eh?"

"Well," Martin said. "Confound it, no man could see Maddelena without having *some* ideas, but—"

"O.K.," Carlo said, nodding affably. "I don't object. What's the use objecting, anyway? You get a living doll like Maddelena, you get fellers getting ideas, it's natural."

"Yes," Martin said.

Carlo rose to his feet, started away from the table and then, as an afterthought, turned to pick up the pistol. Martin watched him despondently, thinking that Max Blant would never have missed a chance like that. For some moments the Italian paced the floor of the saloon, meditatively rubbing his night-shadowed jowl with the snout of the pistol. Presently he stopped and turned to face Martin. "Maddelena say anything about me?" he queried. "She tell you any stories about me?"

The humiliation of his capture was still raw in Martin. "She said that she was your mistress," he answered frigidly, "and that

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you were an unprincipled thug of an Italian gangster who had made his money out of black-market deals, cigarette smuggling, and business—business! What is it nowadays, arms for the O.A.S.?"

"No," Carlo said. "Real estate, motor scooters, women's shoes, espresso machines. She ain't my mistress; she's my niece."

Martin looked down at the table. He closed his eyes, seeing Maddelena with a faraway look in her eyes in a riverside restaurant in Gerona. There came over him the sudden unquestionable conviction that Carlo was telling the truth.

"She's was my elder brother's kid," the Italian was saying. "He got killed when we was in the cigarette business—shot up by what you call hi-jackers." He shook his head sadly. "Maddelena's stories," he said, "always the same—piece of the truth, lots of lies, all tied up like a chocolate box with ribbons. She should be a writer—like you."

"She's in the habit of doing this kind of thing?" Martin asked.

"Too right she is," Carlo said.

"Why?"

The Italian shrugged. "For the kicks. If life ain't going fast enough for her, she kinda speeds it up a little."

Martin nodded.

"She's a good kid," Carlo said, "just irresponsible, that's all. I don't grumble. I took it on with my eyes open. Luigi, my brother, when he was dying, bleeding like a stuck pig on a beach near Anzio—'Carlo,' he said, 'you take care of Maddelena. Promise you take care of Maddelena.' So I promised. I been taking care ever since. Dio mio, is like being given a lion cub for a present—very pretty, very sweet, cute as hell, but trouble! Oh, my God!"

"Well, I'll be damned!"

Carlo chuckled. "Some girl, eh? You got my sympathy."

"You've got mine."

"You like a drink?" Carlo demanded. "You must want a drink after all that swimming. What you like—brandy, whisky, rum, gin, aquavit, tequila, ouzo, pernod, slivovitz? How you feelin'? I feel like someone trod on my belly with a lead boot . . ."

Carlo poured three fingers of Hine's Grand Fine Champagne, 1919, into Martin's glass. "Listen," he said, "you know what Maddelena wants? I know what Maddelena wants. A man. So I find her men. I find her long ones and short ones, plain ones and fancy ones, rich ones—even one or two poor ones. What does she do? She scares 'em all to death. She tells 'em she's wanted for murder an' will they run her out of the country in a boat. She says she has a grandmother in a nut-house who was framed by a wicked uncle an' will they help her to rescue the old doll. See what I mean?"

"I see what you mean," Martin admitted.

"I can tell you, I just about run out of men," Carlo said. "The word's been passed around. Now the only ones left are those who'd marry the nutty grandmother if the dough was right."

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" It's a problem," Martin said.

" You're telling me it's a problem," Carlo said grimly. Then he chuckled and leaned across the table to pat Martin affectionately on the hand. " Do you know," he said, " when you came aboard tonight, I damn near give you another in the guts an' chucked you overboard again. I was still a bit sore, I guess. Then I said to myself, Carlo, you're nuts, here's a perfectly O.K. English guy with the best chance yet—"

" Chance? "

" Chance of putting one over on Maddelena."

" I think," Martin said, " you had better explain."

" You don' catch on? " Martin shook his head.

" Look," Carlo said, " this is what usually happens. Maddelena meets some guy. He is under seventy and he don't have cross-eyes so, O.K., she likes him. Soon as she reckons she likes him, she gives him the test—you know, the boat out of the country or the nutty grandmother. An' so far nobody's passed it. But with you, Martin boy, is different. We're in a restaurant, Maddelena an' I, having a little fight. I get sore and sock her and, blam! I get a punch in the belly that lays me out for half an hour—from someone she don't even know yet! Boy, did that register with Maddelena! "

" Go on," Martin said. " There are flaws in your argument, but go on."

" So she goes off with you for a ride round the Spanish countryside and doesn't come back until three in the morning, so I get so mad I get some of my boys and lay for you and we take Maddelena off, kickin' and screamin'. Ten minutes later you're knockin' on her cabin door. You've swum out to the rescue! Boy, you've passed two tests without even being tested."

" There is a difference, Carlo," Martin said sadly. " The others, I presume, were in love with Maddelena—even wanting to marry her. I like her. I find her extremely attractive. But I don't want to marry her. I've been married. And anyway, whatever you say, I greatly doubt that she would want to marry me. She wants to marry Max Blant."

" Who is this Max character? All the way to the boat she was screaming, ' Max, Max! ' "

" It's a long story. Max Blant is the main character in the books I write. He never stops knifing unfortunate Russians and tossing women into haystacks. He's irresistible and he makes me want to throw up. Maddelena thinks he's wonderful. All right, if I were Max it might be different, but I'm not! "

" Who socked me in the stomach back in that hotel? " Carlo asked. " You or Max Blant? "

" I did," Martin said.

Carlo grinned. " O.K., Max," he said . . .

The level in the brandy bottle was down by four inches. " Look, Martin," Carlo was saying. " With the rough you gotta take the smooth—I mean with the smooth you gotta take the rough;

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that's life, eh? So with Maddelena there is some rough now and again—bad temper, lies, spending money, restlessness, crazy notions. But, boy, there is smooth also. You know that, you got eyes! An' she makes you laugh, eh? I bet she makes you laugh. And she makes you feel young, eh? If she don't make you feel young, then you must be dead. She makes me feel young an' I'm her uncle!"

"I think you must be mad, Carlo," Martin said. "You know nothing about me. All there is between us is two punches in the stomach and an hour's conversation."

"I got judgment," Carlo said. "That's how I make money. I look at a man an' I know what he's good for. You got ties, maybe? Another girl?"

"No."

"You got money? Sure you got money—you didn't get that car of yours out of a cereal packet."

Martin remembered Maddelena shopping in Gerona and winced. "I doubt if I have Maddelena's kind of money," he said. "In fact I'm sure of it."

Carlo pulled a contemptuous face. "O.K., so you need some more money. What's money? I got enough for ten Maddelenas."

"All right," Martin said. "All right, Carlo. I'll think about it. Only don't bully me. I'll see her again tomorrow and perhaps, if she seems to like me, I might—well, we might at least get engaged. I still think it's ridiculous, but . . ."

Carlo shook his head sadly. "Boy," he said, "you take a lot of convincing. Look, Martin, if you want Maddelena you gotta take her *now*. For Maddelena now you're a hero. So stay a hero! Why not? She wants it. You want it, but you won't admit it. Here, take the pistol." He held out the Biretta butt foremost. Martin took it like a man in a dream.

"Now," Carlo went on, "we go forrad to the crew's quarters, both of us together, and we push 'em all in the sail locker and lock 'em in—only I tell the boys not to make a fuss about it. O.K.? Then we come back here and you tie me up good. O.K.? Then you go get Maddelena and you passed *three* tests without bein' tested! Mama mia, it can't go wrong."

For the second time Martin crept up, cat-footed, to Maddelena's cabin door. In his stomach Carlo's good brandy was providing warmth and encouragement. In his mind Carlo's arguments had had the designed effect; all doubts had gone. He was wondering, in fact, why he had ever doubted, because it stood out like a chapel hat-peg that he was the man for Maddelena. What she needed was guidance; to use an ancient but apt cliché, the iron hand in the velvet glove. And who could give her such guidance? Some half-baked twenty-five-year-old, or a man in the prime of life, sophisticated, tolerant, knowing life, knowing that women were always women and never goddesses? The answer was ridiculously obvious.

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He slipped the key in the lock, turned it, and opened the door. The light snapped on. Maddelena was sitting up in bed, wearing a pyjama top that resembled a Japanese tunic, cut fully and pulled in at the waist with a scarlet sash.

She stared at Martin, naked to the waist, with the Biretta pistol in one hand and a cosh in the other. "Dio mio," she said. "Martin!" Her eyes were wide with awe and astonishment.

"What the devil do you mean by telling me Carlo was your lover when in fact he's your uncle?" Martin asked grimly.

"I—I don't know, Martin," Maddelena said piteously. "To make you jealous, perhaps. To excuse a little my own bad behaviour." She shrugged. "It was an impulse. I am very sorry. I wish I could stop myself doing such things; I know it is wrong but I do not seem able to control myself. Did—did Carlo tell you? Why have you got his pistol?"

"Carlo told me," Martin said, "but not before I had knocked him out, taken his pistol, locked up the crew in the sail locker, and tied him up. Do you realise what you've let me in for? If Carlo chooses, he can have me locked up for about fifty years."

"Oh, Martin, I am so sorry. He won't do that. I shall not let him do that. Is he very angry?"

"That," Martin said, "is a very foolish question."

She nodded miserably. "Yes, I suppose it is. Well, this is all my fault, and I must put it right. I shall go now to Carlo and explain and ask him to forgive me."

"I wouldn't if I were you. When I left him, he was shouting something about putting you in a nunnery."

"In a nunnery!" Maddelena's eyes flashed. "Ah, that, no!" she said. "Who does he think he is, Cesare Borgia? A nunnery! Dio mio, he must be mad!" She swung her legs over the edge of the bed. Martin took her by the shoulders. "Stop it," he said commandingly. "Control yourself for once. Carlo is safely tied up and gagged and I have something to say."

Maddelena struggled. "No, Martin," she said. "You have done enough. This is between me and Carlo. You wait—after I have had ten minutes with him, there will be no more talk about nunneries! And there will be no complaints about what you have done. If he tries to send for the police I shall shoot him. I—"

Martin kissed her, putting his heart into it.

Presently Maddelena said, "Martin, are you always like this?"

"Only when my blood is up."

She put up her hand and touched his cheek. The rough with the smooth, Martin thought. Here was the smooth. He kissed her again, leaning forward so that she was forced back against the pillows. Her arms wrapped themselves round his neck and her body arched against him. Martin pulled himself away from her and shook himself like a spaniel. "Look," he said thickly, "I've broken half the laws of the country for you and I want something back."

"Yes, Martin—anything."

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"I want you to come away with me, now. I want you to marry me while I still feel as I do now. Will you?"

"I—I, Martin, I cannot think."

"Try," Martin said brutally.

"There is Carlo."

"To hell with Carlo. He wants you married, doesn't he?"

"Yes."

"Do you love me?"

"Oh, yes, Martin, I love you dearly."

"And will you marry me?"

"Yes, Martin."

"Right," Martin said. "Then we'll go now. No question of asking Carlo; I've had enough of you two fighting like a couple of alley cats. When we are married we can let him know. I suspect there's every chance he will be delighted. Do you agree?"

"Yes, Martin."

"Then pack. One suitcase, no more."

"Yes, Martin." She jumped out of bed and ran to a chest of drawers. Martin watched her for a moment, squared his shoulders, and went out on deck. He prowled as far as the deck-house and glanced in through the window. Carlo, bound and gagged and lying on a settee, raised an eyebrow. Martin nodded and held up his thumb. Then he went back to Maddelena's cabin. She was wearing the toreador pants again and had a suitcase half packed.

"Come on," Martin said. "If the crew break out and find us here, there'll be a fight and God knows what'll happen."

"Yes, Martin, I am being as quick as I possibly can."

Presently she was packed. Martin took her in his arms. "I love you," he said. "I think you are probably incorrigible and that being married to you is going to be like being married to a volcano, but all the same I love you dearly."

"Yes, Martin," Maddelena said. "Oh, I love you too, and I shall try very hard to be good."

"You'd better," Martin said. "Come on, we'll take the launch."

Amadeu stood in the half-open door of his bar with a candle in his hand. Wrapped in an antiquated dressing-gown, his head stuck abruptly on a wizened neck, he looked like a startled turtle.

"Hola, Amadeu," Martin said. "This is the Signorina Maddelena Visconti whom I am going to marry. We want you to hide us until the *Sofia Graciosa* leaves Sa Fosca. The signorina's uncle cannot be trusted to approve of the match."

"Caramba!" said Amadeu. Then he laughed and started to dance a little dance round and round the bar.

Maddelena clapped her hands. "Oh, Martin," she said, "this is just the way I've always dreamed of getting married."

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